

# UC Riverside

## UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

The Twelve Step Recovery Model as an Ethic of Liberation

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4qs034n9>

### Author

Emmett, Patrick Flaherty

### Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

The Twelve Step Recovery Model as an Ethic of Liberation

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

by

Patrick Flaherty Emmett

December 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Jennifer Hughes, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Michael Alexander, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Muhamad Ali

Copyright by  
Patrick Flaherty Emmett  
2015

The Dissertation of Patrick Flaherty Emmett is  
approved:

---

---

Committee Co-Chairperson

---

Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Twelve Step Recovery Model as an Ethic of Liberation

by

Patrick Flaherty Emmett

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Religious Studies  
University of California, Riverside, December 2015

Dr. Jennifer Hughes, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Michael Alexander, Co-Chairperson

The Twelve Steps can be viewed as an alternative medium for the transference of cultural knowledge, one that offers a different approach to constructing and maintaining cultural artifacts. Through this unique process of ethical self-examination and the resultant cessation of old modes of operating within a society that this recovery model encourages, oppressed and marginalized persons of all faiths have been given the tools to rid themselves of constructs that cause them to remain imprisoned in an existence they have participated in creating. Twelve step recovery is itself a path of negation, but not of what the sacred is not; it is rather, a path that deconstructs intellectual, spiritual, ethnic, and societal outlooks and configurations that take part in and enable wide-reaching

exploitation of alcoholics, addicts, and other marginalized persons.

This dissertation examines the impact of the Twelve Step recovery model on American capitalist culture. It takes as an entry point the contention that the particular form of triumphalism engaged in by this culture is both contributory to and a manifestation of the substance and process addictions which the Twelve Steps were designed to address. By examining the historical development of twelve step recovery programs as a response to the ethical tensions of participation in a culture of dominance, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the course of action by which the movement is involved in both transforming and reifying these structures of dominance. I seek to challenge the notion that twelve step movements are primarily effective only in bringing people back in line with the dominant ideological representation of American culture. This challenge will manifest in an interrogation of whether the twelve step movement, through its process of ethical self-assessment and restitution is converting this ideology of dominance of others (which is the dominant ideology) into a belief system based on mutuality and interconnectedness.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iv

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 - Recovery as a Solution to Selfishness 55

Chapter 2 - An Elaboration on the Theory Behind Twelve Step  
Recovery and a Power Greater Than Oneself 69

Chapter 3 - Recovering from "Americanism": An Explication  
of The Twelve Step Recovery Model as an Ethic of  
Liberation, Utilizing H. Richard Niebuhr's Ethic of  
Response 111

Chapter 4 - Achieving Access to a Power Greater Than  
Oneself Through the Use of the Twelve-steps as a Dialectic  
Response to Traditional Religion 139

Chapter 5 - One Alcoholic Talking to Another: The Beginning  
of the Solution 154

Chapter 6 - Why the Twelve Step Model Works 199

Chapter 7: Conclusion 237

Bibliography 267

Appendices

Appendix A: The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous 275

Appendix B: The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous  
276

### Introduction

"Society, in referring to the alcoholic, employs the expression 'the enslavement of alcohol.' For the A.A. member, this statement is in a very special sense paradoxical too, if indeed it is true at all. In sober fact, the member was never enslaved by alcohol. Alcohol simply served as an escape from personal enslavement to the false ideals of a materialistic society.

Yet if we accept society's definition of the alcoholic's earlier state as enslavement by alcohol, the AA member can no longer resent it, for it has served to set him free from all the materialistic traps with which the paths through the jungle of our society are set. For the alcoholic first had to face materialism as a disease of society before he could free himself of the illness of alcoholism and be free of the social ills that made him an alcoholic.

Men and women who use alcohol as an escape are not the only ones who are afraid of life, hostile to the world, fleeing from it into loneliness. Millions who are not alcoholics are living today in illusory worlds, nurturing the basic anxieties and insecurities of human existence rather than face themselves with courage and humility. To these people, AA can offer as a cure no magic potion, no chemical formula, no powerful drug. But it can demonstrate to them how to use the tools of humility, honesty, devotion, and love, which indeed are the heart of the Twelve Steps of our recovery." -*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.*, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services (author), New York:Alcoholics Anonymous World Services (publisher) 1957.

Do you find yourself unable to avoid consuming a substance or engaging in an activity that you are absolutely certain is harmful for you? Do you need help overcoming a particular nasty habit or negative way of thinking or living? Are you powerless over these things? Have you lost the power to choose whether or not to engage in these activities? If your answer is no, consider yourself to be very fortunate (or possibly, in deep denial). Alas, for



many people, the answer to these questions is yes. For these people, life has become hellish to an ever-increasing extent. Not everyone is at the hellish point, but if the following demographic statistics are any indication, many more are well on their way to such a condition.

The use of alcohol has been a part of American culture from its colonial beginnings, and there are few signs that this phenomenon is dissipating. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, from a study completed in 2013, nearly 90% of people ages 18 or older reported that they drank alcohol at some point in their lifetime; within the last year reported, 70% drank at least once, and almost 60% reported drinking within the last month. Many people engage in what is called binge drinking, or drinking so much in such a concentrated time period (about 2 hours) that one's blood-alcohol level reaches .08, which is the legal limit in most states. (National Institute of Health-National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism March 2015)

These figures are for one substance, alcohol, arguably the most abused substance in American society, but hardly

the only one. A human being can become addicted to almost any substance or activity, from alcohol and drugs, to gambling, sex, shopping, food; the list is extensive. People lose the power to choose whether or not to use the substance or engage in the activity. So again, if your answer to the questions above regarding your own powerlessness is that you are not, consider yourself blessed. But, if your answer to the same question is 'yes, I am unable to choose whether or not to do these things safely,' you may benefit, as millions of people have, from participating in a Twelve Step Recovery program.

In this dissertation you will learn about the Twelve Steps, how they were developed and initially implemented within the context of the fellowship known as Alcoholics Anonymous (the original Twelve Step Recovery fellowship). For those who are not at all familiar with these Steps I am presenting them here in this introduction:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol-that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Anonymous 59-60)

This dissertation will also explore the notion that putting these Steps to practice in one's life, whether one is an alcoholic or suffers from any other possible addiction(s) (as many people suffer from more than one) serves to transform the life of that practitioner, and that this transformation, in turn, by its very nature as a shared practice with fellow sufferers, has the potential to

implement further transformation at the societal level. In effect, the Twelve Steps as they are embodied in their various manifestations (over 200 groups now use the Twelve Steps), can be said to serve as a collective social movement. **The thesis of this dissertation is that the Twelve Step Recovery Model is an ethic of liberation from addiction, but even more so from the underlying selfishness and materialism that lies at the root of addiction.** Proponents of the Twelve Steps offer, through a step by step process starting with admission of powerlessness and moving to acknowledgement of one's own part in the activation of the addiction, on to the amends process and finally to a spiritual awakening, a way of transforming one's life. Along the path one utilizes newly discovered resources, born of the suffering one has endured in their addiction, especially those qualities of honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness, which allow the practitioner of the Steps to tap into an unsuspected inner resource, or higher power, that relieves them of the compulsion and obsession to continue the addictive process. The Twelve Steps were originally outlined by Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill W. (Wilson-last initials were used for identification to protect anonymity) in the eponymously

titled text otherwise known as the Big Book. The ultimate goal of the program is to give the sufferer access to this unsuspected inner resource; in fact, this purpose is stated clearly within the book, whose "...main object is to enable [the reader] to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem." (Anonymous 45)

Having looked at the problem of alcoholism, it is fitting to look at some of the available statistics on recovery from the problem. The effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous, the most recognized Twelve Step recovery program, in treating alcoholism is a subject of ongoing research and debate. While some studies have suggested an association between AA attendance and increased abstinence or other positive outcomes, (Humphreys, Blodgett, Wagner 2014), (Walitzer, Dermen, Barrick 2009), (Litt, et al 2009), (Moos and Moos 2006); other research says there is no direct association. (Terra, et al. 2008), (Stahlbrandt, Johnsson, and Berglund 2007)

Defining elements of effectiveness and success depends on several factors related to who is doing the analysis and definition. Demographics regarding the efficacy of Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve Step fellowships are

culled from surveys of individuals attending actual AA meetings, or from these other twelve-step recovery programs based on the original twelve-step model. There are some natural obstacles in determining the actual effectiveness of the TSRM due to the overall difficulty of controlling the database; in other words, there are problems getting accurate information from individuals who are attempting to remain anonymous and who, by their very nature as alcoholics may have some difficulty in differentiating the fantasy from the reality of their lives. There is no absolutely verifiable way to test whether success or failure is based on the program itself or the efforts of the individuals involved and being assessed by such surveys.

One of the most recent studies of AA, conducted in 2014 by Keith Humphreys, Janet Blodgett and Todd Wagner concluded that "increasing AA attendance leads to short- and long-term decreases in alcohol consumption that cannot be attributed to self-selection." (Humphreys, Blodgett, and Wagner 2014) Again, the issue with this study relates to the level of motivation of those who partook in the survey. But the study overall suggests that those who really make

an effort to go to meetings are strengthened in their ability to remain abstinent.

Although there may be some question of bias in their assertions, according to Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, the central office and clearinghouse for the loosely organized original Twelve Step fellowship known as Alcoholics Anonymous, as of the most recent (1990) analysis of surveys, about 40% of AA members sober for less than a year will remain another year. About 80% of those sober less than five years will remain sober and active in the fellowship another year. About 90% of the members sober five years or more will remain sober and active in the fellowship another year: however the survey states that this information does not predict the number that will remain sober, and those who remain sober but not in the fellowship cannot be calculated. These figures have been repeated within a few percentage points using the same calculations since 1974. (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services 1990) According to AA's 2014 membership survey, 27% of members have been sober less than one year, 24% have 1-5 years sober, 13% have 5-10 years, 14% have 10-20 years, and 22% have more than 20 years sober. (A.A. World Services 2014)

Other studies falling under the Cochrane Review of eight studies measuring the efficacy of Alcoholics Anonymous claimed to find no measurable difference between the Twelve Step Recovery Model and other forms of treatment (Ferri, et al. 2006); however, since that study other researchers have noted that new factors, including the emergence of Twelve Step Facilitation (TSF), which seek to introduce individuals to the Twelve Step format and steer them to such groups as AA and NA (Narcotics Anonymous), are cause for re-assessment of the Cochrane Review. Dr. Lee Ann Kaskutas, a senior scientist at the Alcohol Research Group who has conducted TSF studies, explained that TSFs are generally geared toward familiarizing patients with the sometimes quirky nuances of the philosophy and attitude of 12-step programs like AA. (Singal, 2015) These facilitation measures, according to Dr. John Kelly, a clinical psychologist and addiction specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, are increasingly effective. (Singal *ibid.*) The data from the TSF studies, argued Kelly and Kaskutas, suggest that Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Step Recovery Model outclasses many alternatives such as cognitive behavioral therapy in terms of length of abstinence. What does this



information on recovery tell us about the potential for transformation that exists within the rooms of these Twelve Step fellowships? Why does this potential for transformation have resonance with the larger population, i.e. those who do not suffer from addiction or compulsions or obsessions? I suggest it is because there is an important element that these people in recovery have discovered about themselves and their difficulties that can be useful to the larger population, and that is that almost everyone experiences moments of disconnection from their true self due to the basic tensions that arise from attempting to live in a complex world, and the subsequent loss of meaning in their lives, and though this loss of meaning need not be permanent, and though not all of them turn to alcohol or some other addictive substance or activity, anyone who has experienced such a disconnection could certainly benefit from practicing the Twelve Steps in their own lives.

In *Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, Philip Reiff presciently evoked the sense in which modern culture had lost its connection to meaningful authority based on corporate entities such as the Church,

and has come to the point of seeking solutions that are more therapeutic in nature, and thus, more liberative in their reliance on one's own understanding of that which is morally authoritative. Reiff's analysis corroborates the perceived reliance on a Higher Power of one's own understanding that comes out of the admission of powerlessness in the First of the Twelve steps, and leads to Step Two's stated willingness to believe that a power greater than oneself could restore one to the sanity of freedom from addiction. (AA, 59) Rieff insists, as do many communitarians, such as MacIntyre and Hauerwas, that religious authority, specifically one based on the concept of submission to a Higher Power, is necessary in order for an ethic to work. What gives the TSR model its transformative potential and allows it to work as a systematic ethic is the conscious acknowledgement that whatever power for good exists, whatever authority one truly answers to, can ultimately be contacted only "deep within" oneself (55).

The triumph that Rieff alludes to is a two-part phenomenon. One component of this triumph is the notion that talking about one's problems is therapeutic. The

second component, also mirroring the principles outlined in the Steps, is the concept of individual responsibility for one's problems and for one's solution. Both of these elements are present in the Twelve Step Recovery Model as well and are key ingredients in the notion of cultural change as Rieff articulated it. There are hints in the program literature that A.A.'s co-founder, Bill Wilson, considered the possibility of applying the twelve step principles to societal issues in just such a way: "Though the essays which follow were written mainly for members, it is thought by many of A.A.'s friends that these pieces might arouse interest and find application outside A.A. itself." (Anonymous, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 16) Rieff himself was cognizant of this type of stirring within society. This present work examines one such effort at dealing with these cultural tensions, namely, the Twelve Step Recovery Model, and seeks to evaluate its efficacy in helping individuals to deal with such tensions in a less harmful manner than through active alcoholism and addiction. In particular, the TSRM is adept at enabling its practitioners to deal with the pressures of dependence on an economic belief system, Capitalism, which requires one to seek individual success and fulfillment at the expense

of the larger groups needs and the loss of altruism. The Twelve Step Recovery Model serves as a theoretical critique of the tensions inherent in American culture. "Whenever therapeutic elites grow predominantly critical then a cultural revolution is said to be in progress." (Rieff, 15) The twelve steps can be seen as a form of self-help movement consisting of participation in rituals and group interaction which help its participants to abstain from harmful, i.e. addictive, behavior.

Much of what can be claimed as therapeutic in Twelve Step Recovery takes place in meetings. Meetings are the locus for those seeking to gain access to a higher power. I have been the beneficiary of observation and participation in meetings of mostly, but not exclusively, the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous for the last 27 years, and I have witnessed the transformation taking place in people's lives as it has happened over the days, weeks, months, and years of attendance. I have seen men and women who are homeless come to meetings and engage in the fellowship and at some point get their lives together and purchase homes. I have seen men and women who have lost careers regain them. I have seen broken relationships restored, lives that once

seemed not worth living suddenly or, more likely, gradually take on deep meaning.

The meetings themselves are not uniform across the board; there are different types of meetings. First of all, there are 2 important categories: open and closed meetings. In an open meeting all are welcome to attend. However, it is usually the policy of the meeting that only those who have admitted they are alcoholic can actually participate by speaking, as the emphasis is on sharing one's experience, strength, and hope with the recovery process. On the other hand, there are closed meetings at which only alcoholics may attend, possibly because some alcoholics are concerned that they may be spotted by someone in their community and their anonymity be compromised. This reflects the truth that there is still a great deal of stigma attached to the label 'alcoholic' in society in general. The designation of an open or closed status is determined by the group conscience of each particular meeting. There is no outside authority that makes this call as each meeting is autonomous.

The first meeting that I attended, on May 1 of 1988, was a speaker meeting. Speakers are drawn from the general

population of recovering fellows, but not everyone is included in the pool of potential speakers. Again, there are no written rules about who speaks, but usually there are unspoken criteria having to do with the individual's effectiveness in transmitting the message of hope. These speakers share their understanding their own experience in recovery, the power that this experience has given them, not only to abstain from their addictive behavior, but also to overcome the underlying selfishness which they see as the root of their addiction, and the optimism they have acquired regarding a continued commitment to maintaining sobriety.

The usual format of such a meeting is to open with a group prayer, prompted by a leader who has been pre-selected, quite often just before the start of the meeting, by the group secretary, a member selected usually by group vote who serves for a period of 6 months to one year typically. After the reading of selections from the 'Big Book', which is the nickname given to the main text of Alcoholics Anonymous, there is a call for newcomers, those who have less than thirty days of sobriety, to stand up and introduce themselves; this ritual is conducted at nearly

every meeting I have ever intended and is regarded as very important. Indeed, the newcomer is told that they are the 'life-blood' of the fellowship and that they should 'keep coming back' to meetings and encouraged to talk to other members at the break. I recall being approached by other members and warmly welcomed, and subsequently learned that this is indeed the protocol for members who wish to continue to stay sober: reach out to the newcomer and let him or her know that they are welcome and that they matter. The speaker is invited up and greets the audience by saying "Hi, my name is \_\_\_ and I am an alcoholic." The crowd responds back by saying Hi \_\_\_." The speaker then spends the next 45 minutes or so sharing their experience, strength, and hope regarding their recovery from alcoholism. At the end of the talk, the speaker usually thanks the group and expresses gratitude to AA for being the instrument of redemption. There may be some closing comments from the leader and then all are invited to join hands in a large circle and 'pray out' with either the Lord's Prayer or the Serenity Prayer, but not until pausing for a moment of silent meditation for the alcoholic who still suffers. After the meeting there is much activity, with chairs being stacked and put away by those members who

have formal commitments or just spontaneously volunteer to help on the spot, and there is usually a reception line for attendees to thank the speaker for coming to their meeting. Sometimes there will even be an exchange between the speaker and a newer member who is seeking guidance, or 'sponsorship', i.e., help working the Twelve Steps; this usually involves the speaker giving his/her telephone number to the newcomer and setting up a time when they can talk about working the Steps.

There are also other types of meetings. The second meeting that I attended, on the following night, a Monday, was a Big Book study. This was held in a much smaller venue than the speaker meeting, a community room of a local Episcopalian church who had offered space to the group for use. Usually there is a fee exchanged for use of the facility; many churches are looking for extra sources of income, and the AA group is happy to have a stable meeting venue. This particular Big Book study was suggested to me by my AA sponsor, who in this case happened to be the man who answered the phone at the Central Office of Alcoholics Anonymous in Long Beach, the city I got sober in. He directed me to the first several meetings that I attended,



and showed me the literature that most meetings have on hand for the newcomer. I bought a Big Book that night and began reading it when I got home, and read it quite a bit over the next few days. (I have subsequently read it many times, and I have come to rely upon it for guidance in working the Steps myself and in guiding others on how to work the Steps too.) At this particular meeting I found myself greeted by members of the group, some of whom I recognized from the much larger speaker meeting the night before. I was shown to a seat and invited to partake in the coffee and cookies that were available on the counter. After an opening prayer (the Serenity Prayer is typically used at this point) we began reading from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book) which is, as I mentioned, the text for not only these meetings but for the program as a whole. When the focus is on a specific text, usually the group supplies copies of the book for attendees. Subsequently I learned that people would bring their own copies so that they could make notes in them regarding significant passages or revelations that they might come to while studying the book. Usually the group will read the text aloud, taking turns going around the room, and then discuss what they had read afterwards. There

was a pause in the meeting, known as a 'smoke break', to allow members who smoked tobacco to indulge in that pursuit. At the time I entered recovery, smoking was still allowed within meetings, although some meetings, and this particular one, did not allow smoking within the room as it was also being used by members of the church community. During the break then, members who smoked, (including myself at the time) went outside to a courtyard and smoked and drank coffee. This is also a beneficial occasion for getting to know other members of the group. Many a life-long friendship has been forged at these smoke breaks, which are still a mainstay of most AA meetings.

The book study and speaker meetings are but two of the types of meetings available in the recovery network. I recall on the next night going to what is called a participation or discussion meeting. In this type of meeting there is again a leader/chairperson (depending on the nomenclature used in that particular location) designated to lead the meeting; the chairperson speaks briefly about their experience, strength and hope. Following this the chairperson may suggest a topic for sharing by other attendees. On the night that I first

attended this type of meeting, it was held in a room of the local post office. This room had a few tables running the length, with chairs around them, and I remember that this was a meeting that allowed smoking. I have subsequently been able to quit for many years, but I remember that the nicotine was very calming to my newly sober nerves, and that I was glad I could indulge. This is a typical feeling of newly sober people, who are feeling anxious without their liquid medicine, which may have become problematic for them but still calls to them at times with its promise to soothe the nerves. Needless to say then, there is a great deal of consumption of 'safer' alternatives to alcohol, such as coffee, cigarettes, and sweets.

One of the most significant memories of that evening, my third day of sobriety, was of an elderly woman who stated that she was sober for what seemed to me at the time to be an impossible length of time (twenty or more years) and I found her to be entertaining and a bit quirky. Her name was Mary and she finished her 'pitch' or share with a statement of gratitude to the rest of the members for being there because she couldn't 'afford a psychiatrist.' The group laughed and applauded her appreciatively. I

subsequently witnessed her make the same statement in meetings throughout the time that I knew her before she passed away, and also became familiar with the tag lines of other members who would close their sharing with their own memorable, sometimes quirky, but always entertaining final statements. Many AA meetings are quite riotous, as members regale the group with tales of drunken escapades; the point that Bill W., co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous makes that "we are not a glum lot..." is reinforced constantly, that those in recovery are "happy, joyous, and free..." for the most part, notwithstanding and even in spite of the fact that they are dealing with a serious, life-threatening condition.

On my fourth night of sobriety I went to what is called a Beginner meeting. These meetings are usually led by more experienced group members with the primary focus on introducing new members to the tools available for the maintenance of sobriety. Beginners are not restricted to meetings of this type; they are welcomed at all meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. A benefit of a "beginner" meeting is the opportunity to meet fellow newcomers as they start their sober lives. I had begun to feel at home in these

meetings; for the most part people were very friendly, and I sensed something that I have come to experience myself over the years I have returned to these rooms-that people were genuinely happy to see me. I have learned since then that this feeling truly is sincere, and has to do with the fact that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and Twelve Step Recovery in general, is based on the idea of altruism and thinking of others rather than oneself, as a remedy to the crippling selfishness that alcoholics and others seeking recovery suffer from.

There can be different sub-categories of these main types of meetings, but in general they are formatted to bring the group together as a unified whole with the principal goal being to stay abstinent oneself and concurrently to help others do the same. Intense emotional states are often generated as individuals express stories of both their spiraling into the depths of alcoholism and their subsequent recovery as a result of the Steps. I can honestly say that I have almost always come away from a Twelve Step meeting, no matter which fellowship, feeling better than when I entered the room.

In order to pursue this path of research it was helpful to examine archival material which is located in the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous. This office is located in New York City, and I made a visit, at which time I examined this material, both written and audio-recorded, looking for insight into the initial development of the twelve step model. My research method also involved engagement in ethnographic research concentrating on observation and interviewing of members of Twelve Step groups.

Alcoholics Anonymous employs the tool of discourse as its primary technology for achieving the goal of spiritual awakening. According to the wording of the Twelfth Step, upon realization of this awakening as the result of the previous steps, members seek to carry the message of recovery to other alcoholics and to practice the principles of recovery-honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, brotherly love, justice, perseverance, spirituality, and service-in all their affairs. As discourse is the primary technology, study of AA lends itself to ethnography. By engaging people in the rooms, or meetings, hearing the descriptions of their lives

as recovering persons, I was able to make note of how they themselves made sense of the world through the application of the Steps. Basically, I looked at this particular group of (mostly) recovering alcoholics and addicts, particularly regarding the ways in which they applied these steps and their corresponding principles to their recovery process, and attempted to systematically describe these steps and the resultant experiences as engaged in by the participants.

My research is a product of an insider's perspective. During the collection of data and writing of this dissertation there was always the concern with violating the tradition of anonymity that is so valuable to Alcoholics Anonymous; even if I decide to compromise my own anonymous position, I have no right to endanger another's. The approach I used has its advantages in terms of reaching an understanding of the phenomenon of recovery from the point of view of the participants. One advantage is the access to the people I am writing about that I have had for over twenty seven years. Thus, I have taken measures to protect anonymity by never using real names and obscuring

some details that might make it possible to identify the narrator of any particular anecdote.

My approach is a phenomenological, rather than a positivist, methodology. It is qualitative (based on verbal data), rather than quantitative (based on numerical data). To the extent that I have been able, my research and collection of this data has been conducted within the rooms of Twelve Step meetings, and also in conversation and shared activities (mainly meals, but also one on one activities and celebrations of sobriety milestones) outside the rooms. I have been fortunate to be able to study my subject within its social and cultural contexts, which hopefully lends to the authenticity of the data.

My fieldwork was conducted in three primary locations, all within Southern California: Long Beach for fourteen years, West Los Angeles/Hollywood/Venice for 4 years, and Riverside for 7 years. During this time I have gained valuable insight into the ways in which the people of those communities of recovery have been transformed, but the difficulty in showing this transformation and its impact on culture persists. I am concerned that my data may be biased in two ways: 1) in that my participation in the phenomenon



of recovery has influenced both my observations and my subjects' behavior (as a practitioner of the Twelve Steps myself, my own sobriety is dependent on helping others work the program, and as a result, achieve a spiritual awakening of their own), and 2) that my own beliefs about the transformational capacity of the TSRM are too subjective, based as they are on my personal experience.

As I have stated, the thesis of this dissertation is that the Twelve Step Recovery Model is an ethic of liberation from addiction, but even more so from the underlying selfishness and materialism that lies at the root of addiction. The program of action involved engages directly with the negative aspects of individualism, particularly the self-centered pride that is in good measure a component of the philosophy of Western capitalist culture. The Twelve Step Recovery Model offers a way of transformation based on a spiritual, rather than merely humanistic, experience which is itself based on the admission of one's powerlessness. This way, or ethic, of transformation, or liberation, utilizes a newly discovered-for the recovering person, that is-honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness to admit their powerlessness

over some substance or activity, examine their lives in an ethical fashion, make amends for wrongs done, and continue to practice the principles learned through this process in all areas. Engaging in this process causes a shift in one's core values, directing that very same erstwhile selfish, self-obsessed person to look at the world through a radically altered altruistic framework that places caring for others above selfish and materialistic concerns. This shift is demonstrated by a spirit of service to others which replaces those pursuits and releases the practitioner of the Steps from their self-constructed prison based on their attempts to serve that imperious selfishness which is their addiction. In this self-constructed prison, no amount of praise or material possessions can fill the insatiable need that addiction demands of its captive entity. My assertion is that this underlying insatiability is the true malady that these people suffer from, and it is through this unique process of ethical self-assessment and the resultant cessation of old modes of operating within a society that this recovery model embodies, that oppressed and marginalized persons of all faiths have been given the tools to rid themselves of constructs that cause them to remain imprisoned in an existence they have participated in

creating, by practicing these principles in all their affairs.

What Lies Ahead: This dissertation consists of several chapters, each one treating a different aspect of the conversation about the Twelve Step Recovery Model. Chapter One explains both the concept of Recovery and gives a history of the development of Alcoholics Anonymous, the first Twelve Step Group. Chapter Two then elaborates on some of the literature and theory that I found helpful in examining this topic, with particular attention being paid to those elements of theory culled from an interdisciplinary subset which help to support the thesis that the Twelve Step Recovery Model is a system designed to address the underlying issue of self-centered materialism that lies at the root of alcoholism. Chapter Three then continues the thread of this argument by examining how the TSRM addresses this fundamental problem affecting not only alcoholics but other individuals as well, through the lens of modern therapeutic approaches. In Chapter Four the discussion of how the TSRM works from a theoretical basis is pursued, in an examination of the model as a cultural-sociological technology. Chapter Five demonstrates, through

accounts offered by practitioners of the Twelve Steps, how this solution to self-centered materialism is articulated in these narratives utilizing the format common to speakers in recovery; i.e. they frame their story in these terms: 'What We Were Like, What Happened, and What We are Like Now'. Finally, in Chapter 6, I evaluate the TSRM as to whether it holds up to my assertion that it can be a solution for the general population, rather than just for those who suffer from the outward manifestations of selfishness, and draw conclusions regarding what might be possible for individuals and the groups they form, should this model continue to be utilized in the construction of communal arrangements.

#### **A. Problem Statement**

This dissertation examines the impact of the Twelve Step recovery model on American culture. I make the claim that the Twelve Steps, as practiced, are a discursive ethic of liberation. In employing the term discursive I mean to say that the twelve step recovery model serves on one level as an extended argument over how a society is to be constructed and maintained (Lincoln, 1989, 5). Part of what I am arguing here is that this engagement in the argument

as to how societies are to be constructed is a basic function of religion, and so what I am declaring is that the TSRM functions on that level as an element of religion. Scholars point out several fundamental elements of religion, including among them the element of ethics. Many insiders in Twelve Step movements prefer to call what they do a spiritual practice rather than a religion, yet if one were to examine these practices more closely, particularly from the perspective of the original Twelve Step movement, Alcoholics Anonymous, in light of these criteria, an argument could be made for its categorization as a religion.

What are these elements of religion? Most scholars would include the following elements: 1) Belief system, or worldview; 2) Community; 3) Myth or narrative (the central framing stories of a culture); 4) Ritual; 5) Ethics (usually coming from a supernatural origin). Let us briefly examine the TSRM in its first articulation, Alcoholics Anonymous, to see if any of these elements of religion are characteristic.

1) Belief system: The belief system embodied in AA, and passed along to most other groups that fall under the TSRM model, is based on practicing the Twelve Steps and the

corresponding principles (Anonymous, 59-60), trusting in a higher power ( God as He is understood), and cleaning house, or making amends. (98) Further, the TSRM as it originated and was codified in the Big Book (the nick name for the original text of Alcoholics Anonymous, because it was much larger than the pamphlets previously used), calls for staying active in service to others, and for a faith that, as demonstrated by fellow practitioners, one can stay sober (abstinent) one day at a time, for the rest of one's life. It is the belief, as articulated by Dr. William D. Silkworth, "chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction" (xxv) and contributor of the "Doctor's Opinion" (xxv-xxxii) that one must "experience an entire psychic change" (spiritual experience) to have any hope of recovery from alcoholism. Most fundamentally, this is a belief system based on altruistic love, guided by a loving Higher Power, or God, as "express[ed] ...in our group conscience." (562) It is the belief that there is a loving essence which can only be detected "...in the last analysis...deep down within" each person. (55) This belief system counters other beliefs that alcoholics have lived with for most of their lives, such as the belief that there is no power greater than their own

mind, that they are alone in the universe without resources to live in the world they find themselves in, and so they must turn to alcohol, drugs, or some other substitute form of a power greater than themselves. Recovery from alcoholism begins when the sufferer admits his powerlessness and becomes willing to believe that a power greater than themselves can give them freedom.

2) Community: Defined as a group of persons sharing a common characteristic or interest, this word is quite apropos of Twelve Step groups. Members of these groups share a common characteristic, the affliction that brings them together, and a common interest, recovery from that affliction. As stated in the AA Preamble (first published in 1947 in the Grapevine, AAs monthly newsletter): "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship (community) of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other (narrative) that they may solve their *common* problem and help others to achieve [recovery]." The community is the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, with its meetings, one-on-one conversations and sponsorship, parties and celebrations of recovery milestones, and a general sense of camaraderie that one experiences with a group of like-minded individuals who share a common goal.

It is a mutual help community rather than a self-help (individualist) construct. There is a shared belief system and shared practices, (the Twelve Steps). Elements of religion are not uniformly discrete, and there is crossover. This is true for the TSRM as well. Community is about sharing stories and thus creating Narrative (the third element), while in turn Narrative is involved in creating Community, for it is in sharing stories of common experience that Community is cemented. This is very much the case for members of Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve Step communities, as they relate "what we were like, what happened, and what we are like now." (58) Members tell stories to each other, and listen to each other's stories, and by doing so are able to identify common elements in their stories which bind them together.

3) Narrative: These stories that create community also have elements in common. Just as with religions in general, the central narratives, or myths (as they are referred to in the Religious Studies' sense) of the Twelve Step groups help to explain the beliefs and origins of the group, how things came to be as they are presently. These stories provide a framework for the religion to build on. They are told often, and they may or may not be completely factual.



Narratives such as these are most certainly not verifiable, at least readily, but that is also an accepted aspect of narrative as it applies to religion.

4) Ritual: A ritual "is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence." (Merriam-Webster) Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community. They are certainly utilized for Twelve Step meetings. AA meetings vary considerably in their particular readings and rituals from place to place, even within the same general geographic location. Each meeting has its own style of opening and closing. A common sequence (there are many variations) in the Southern California area might look something like this:

- The meeting is called to order by a leader, who is selected by the meeting secretary. Usually the secretary asks someone to lead the meeting right before the meeting starts. Sometimes a person requests to lead, or do one of the readings.
- The leader may begin by reading the AA Preamble\*, and then ask those present to join him/her in the Serenity Prayer.

---

\* The AA Preamble states: 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 A.A. membership; we are selfsupporting through our own contributions.

- Typically someone reads a portion of Chapter 3: More About Alcoholism (30-31), another person reads a portion of Chapter 5: How it Works (58-60), and someone will read either the Traditions (562), the Promises (83-84), or a portion of A Vision for You (164).
- The leader asks if there are any newcomers or people attending that particular meeting for the first time who care to introduce themselves by their first name. (This is completely optional and may be ignored by newcomers if desired, although it is obviously a good idea to introduce oneself in order for others to begin to get to know him or her.)
- Some meetings also ask for visitors from outside the local area to introduce themselves.
- AA-related announcements are conducted at this point in some meetings, or at the end of the meeting before closing.
- The meeting itself, whether a discussion, Big Book Study, Step Study or speaker meeting.
- Conclusion of meeting proper.
- Sobriety Chips (or medallions) are handed out for lengths of sobriety. This is sometimes done before the sharing portion of the meeting.
- Baskets are passed for voluntary donations to pay for meeting expenses and contributions to various levels of Alcoholics Anonymous service offices.

---

A.A. 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 to achieve sobriety.

Copyright © The AA Grapevine, Inc.

Reprinted with permission

- The meeting is officially ended when, after pausing for a moment of silence for the alcoholic who still suffers, someone picked by the leader leads the group, standing in a circle and holding hands, in either the Serenity Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, or some other prayer decided upon at that moment.

5) Ethics: 1. (used with a singular or plural verb) a system of moral principles: the ethics of a culture. 2. the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc.: medical ethics; Christian ethics. (Merrriam-Webster) The Twelve Steps are a system of moral principles which guide the recovery process. The thesis of this dissertation is that the Twelve Steps are an ethic of liberation from addiction, but even more so from the underlying selfishness that lies at the root of addiction.

By engaging in this discursive exercise through the practice of the steps, old beliefs, ideas, and actions are discarded and new beliefs, ideas, and ways of being are adopted. These new ways of being, or ethical patterns, are determined from within, rather than being forced upon persons from the outside, like a template. Discourse used in this manner is thus intended to persuade without having to resort to overt coercion. In this sense it is a form of communication that can be employed verbally and

symbolically, in many forms, including performance, spectacle, physical structure, mediated polemic, etc. Discourse, then, is an instrument of persuasion and can be used either for upholding the status quo or in order to respond to, challenge, "demystify, delegitimize, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role... [in the domination of the]...subordinated." (5). The Twelve Step Recovery Model (TSRM) is functionally discursive in that engaging in it enables those who are subordinates to clearly see their own participation in their subordination, thus giving them the ability to choose another form of societal construction.

## **B. Purpose of the Study**

The thesis of this dissertation takes as an entry point the contention that the particular form of exceptionalist materialism endemic to American culture is both contributory to and a manifestation of the very same addictive/compulsive behaviors that the Twelve Steps were designed to address. I seek to question the prevailing notion that twelve step movements are primarily effective only in bringing people back in line with the dominant

ideology of American culture. This challenge will manifest in an interrogation of whether the Twelve Step movement, through its process of ethical self-assessment, is converting this ideology of dominance and acquisition (which has arguably become the dominant ideology of the American culture) into an authentically democratic ethical system based on mutuality and interconnectedness, or whether it is fostering conformity to current cultural perspectives, patterns, and practices.

### **C. Research Questions**

What does the growing incidence of twelve step movements for treating addictive and obsessive-compulsive behaviors reflect about the overall condition and efficacy of the American capitalist culture? How does this recovery model impact the dominant culture's ability to maintain control over its constituents? How are choices rooted in societal constructs being affected by the increasing necessity of those in recovery to act unselfishly and altruistically in order to remain free of the oppression of addiction? Might continued participation in twelve step recovery lead to large scale societal transformation?

#### **D. Importance of the Study**

This research will be particularly useful to scholars engaged in cultural studies, as well as those who are looking into the impact of new religious movements upon American cultural traditions. I will examine the ways in which the twelve step recovery model, from its original inception in Alcoholics Anonymous to its many current and potential manifestations, creates a space for the articulation and implementation of an ethic of liberation, and what that ethic consists of. Within this American context I will also interrogate whether this particular liberation ethic, primarily identified as a program of action designed to treat alcoholics and addicts, has the potential to serve as well as a mode of transformation for Americans as a whole, who, enabled by the process of ethical self-examination required by the steps, recognize not only the symptomatic manifestations associated with addiction and obsessive-compulsive behavior, but also the underlying sociological and ethical malaise that is a result of the ideological requirements for being a member of such a triumphalist, materialistic culture.

## **E. Scope of the Study**

I start from a presupposition that American culture as it presents itself to the world is triumphalist in nature. In other words, Americans have an attitude of superiority about their expected position in the world. Combined with this attitude, however, is what seems to be an underlying sense of inferiority, as evidenced by the proliferation of both substance and process addictions and the twelve-step recovery programs intended to address these addictions. My hypothesis is that this underlying sense of inferiority is to some extent produced by the very same discourses and practices that have gone into constructing American culture. By examining the historical development of the Twelve-step recovery model, with a particular eye on the tension created by participation in the culture of superiority, I seek to interrogate the ways in which the Twelve-step model serves as both supporting element and transformative agent in the structures of dominance. In addition, I am interested in the ways that the TSRM functions as a counter-hegemonic discourse as well. The point of the project is to unpack the implications of the model for future societal construction.

## **F. Literature Review**

As a way to help explain the concept of alcoholism/addiction I review the significant literature on addiction and recovery as it applies to this dissertation. This is not an exhaustive review, and in light of ongoing research will certainly be expanded upon as I continue my project.

My review of the literature is focused on an underlying, perhaps unarticulated emphasis on the Twelve Steps as a critique of culture, especially as pertaining to the American way of life. Therefore I focused on the seminal literature of recovery. To begin with I reviewed the literature generated by the founding members of Alcoholics Anonymous, the original twelve step movement. The "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous, so called because it was considerably larger than the pamphlets that had been published and disseminated up to that point by the fledgling group, was published in 1939. This publication became the "text" of Alcoholics Anonymous and contained within its pages several important narratives as well as instructions on 'working the steps,' or, in other words, practicing the twelve step 'program'. This program, along



with the accompanying narratives, became the fundamental ethic of recovery from not only alcoholism, but many other substance and process addictions as well. From the opening message of hope in the preface and Forward to the First Edition, to the "Doctor's Opinion," (a medical explanation of the physical aspect of alcoholism which gave the aura of authoritativeness to the disease) and continuing with "Bill's Story," (the conversion story of A.A.'s founder, Bill Wilson) all the way through to the rest of the first 164 pages (instructions on working the steps) and the following personal stories, the Big Book became the driving force for the systematization of the program of recovery, making it available to sufferers of alcoholism. This program has since been made available to millions more through the adaptation of the steps to other addictions and subsequently-identified obsessive-compulsive behaviors.

Another key work from the same author is Wilson's *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.* (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957, 1975) This book is the history of Alcoholics Anonymous told by its co-founders, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, as well as some other key participants in the foundational moments of the movement. Wilson is writing from the perspective of the

1955 International convention in Cleveland, which marked the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of A.A. Especially pertinent for my research has been a statement from Bernard Smith, speaking at the convention, which is then included in the publication:

Society, in referring to the alcoholic, employs the expression 'the enslavement of alcohol.' For the A.A. member, this statement is in a very special sense paradoxical too, if indeed it is true at all. In sober fact, the member was never enslaved by alcohol. Alcohol simply served as an escape from personal enslavement to the false ideals of a materialistic society. Yet if we accept society's definition of the alcoholic's earlier state as enslavement by alcohol, the AA member can no longer resent it, for it has served to set him free from all the materialistic traps with which the paths through the jungle of our society are set. For the alcoholic first had to face materialism as a disease of society before he could free himself of the illness of alcoholism and be free of the social ills that made him an alcoholic.

Men and women who use alcohol as an escape are not the only ones who are afraid of life, hostile to the world, fleeing from it into loneliness. Millions who are not alcoholics are living today in illusory worlds, nurturing the basic anxieties and insecurities of human existence rather than face themselves with courage and humility. To these people, AA can offer as a cure no magic potion, no chemical formula, no powerful drug. But it can demonstrate to them how to use the tools of humility, honesty, devotion, and love, which indeed are the heart of the Twelve Steps of our recovery." - Bernard B. Smith, Chairman, General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, 1951-1956, quoted in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.*

I find this statement to be fundamental to the thesis that the Twelve Steps, as outlined in Alcoholics Anonymous,

are suited not only to treating the symptom of drinking, but are in truth an ethical path which allows for interrogation of the culture and suggests possibilities for improving the conditions of those for whom the culture has become false, diseased.

Wilson was deeply influenced in his early days of sobriety by his reading of William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902). James is regarded by many as the founder of the study of psychology in America. Wilson was brought to the realization of his own need to completely admit powerlessness by reading the accounts in James' book. Dr. Bob Smith, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous and a key participant (in an advisory role) in the development of the program that Wilson forged out of his connection with the Oxford Group, was also deeply influenced by the New Testament, including the Sermon on the Mount and the Book of James (Cheever, 2004). Susan Cheever, in her biography of Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson, relates that the two co-founders drew great strength from the principles of First Century Christianity and saw that emulating such a communal life would be of extreme importance to the fledgling recovery movement's chances for thriving (129ff).

Ann Wilson Schaefer's 1988 treatise *When Society Becomes an Addict* is also a useful text for this research. Schaefer asserts that American society itself has become addicted, falling into a malaise of denial and inaction regarding its growing problems and marginalizing anyone who dares point out these problems. Schaefer's contention is that "rather than looking for ways to change, to save ourselves, we are becoming more conservative, more complacent, more defensive of the status quo" (Schaefer, 1988). This book reveals new perspectives regarding recovery on a socio-cultural level, while still leaving opportunities for further scholarly work on the transformational changes that I argue are necessary.

The part that society plays in addiction is also examined in *The Alcoholic Society: Addiction & Recovery of the Self*. (Denzin, 1993) This work indicts American culture in particular for placing the onus of the problem of addiction on "the shoulders of the individual" addict, while denying any cultural complicity of its own. Denzin's work provides crucial insight into just how American culture is implicated in both the problem and the solution.

Liberation from the bondage of self through a connection with a Higher Power is a key goal of the Twelve

Step Recovery Model. In order to understand how this model functions as an ethic of liberation, it was necessary to look into the literature of liberation theology. Thomas G. Sanders' article on "The Puebla Conference" in American Universities Field Staff Reports is a valuable connecting point in this pursuit. Especially resonant with the Twelve Step recovery model is Sanders' discussion of "integral liberation," which he calls "freedom from 'all forms of servitude, from personal and social sin, from all that divides man and society, and which has its source in egoism, in the mystery of sin'" ( 3, Quoting from the Puebla document).

The particular issue of American Triumphalism, which I define as the attitude or belief that American doctrine, religion, and its culture/social system is superior to and should triumph over all others, is a necessary element of the literature supporting the claim that the Twelve Step recovery model is both responsive to and transformative of American cultural dominance. Triumphalism is not an expressed set of guidelines but rather a term that is used to illustrate definite attitudes or belief systems held by individuals and groups operating within American society. Thus it can be asserted that triumphalism in this context

is the certainty that American Christian political and religious doctrine, American culture, and the American socioeconomic system have all reached a pinnacle of unmatched superiority over the rest of the world's political, religious, cultural, and socioeconomic structures, and that by virtue of this pre-eminent position America should be in control of the world's resources. As a result of this attitude those who hold this perspective are often unable to see clearly their own moral culpability in actions that cause harm to others. Historical examples of this myopic perspective include Americans who participated in and/or sanctioned slavery as well as those who believed and lived by the principle of manifest destiny. Such belief in one's group's superiority can be stultifying, draining the members of their creativity and compassion. Triumphalism, particularly in the American context, blinds those who engage in it to the positive aspects of other cultures, religions, political and social systems, and has been contributory, in American history, to a tendency towards hubris in matters of conflict and resolution. Examples of this abound in the history of American foreign policy, including the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The predatory form of corporate capitalism that has resulted from this triumphalism is pernicious in its effect on the lives of the world's poor. Because of the shortsightedness and denial that triumphalism breeds, those who have the power to make adjustments which would ease the suffering of these human beings cannot see any need for such action. Their responses toward such suffering are dismissive at best and criminal in spirit, if not legally so. In her article "Imperialism, Nationalism, Chauvinism", in *The Review of Politics* 7.4, (October 1945), Hannah Arendt describes triumphalism as chauvinism, as "an almost natural product of the national concept insofar as it springs directly from the old idea of the 'national mission.' ... [A] nation's mission might be interpreted precisely as bringing its light to other, less fortunate peoples that, for whatever reason, have miraculously been left by history without a national mission" (Arendt, 457). This idea of sharing one's 'light' with those less fortunate assumes the superiority of one's own culture as well as the inferiority of another, in more benevolent forms of chauvinism or triumphalism, and in more malevolent forms, that one must take the resources held by these

inferiors and use them properly, as the dominant group defines such propriety.

In Wilfred I. Ukpere and Andre D. Slabbert's "Triumphant capitalism and the future of human, social and economic progress in the post-Cold War era", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Volume 35 No. 6 pp: 417-422, the authors demonstrate the deleterious effects of this triumphalist, capitalist orientation in terms of unemployment, environmental degradation, crime, and poverty. A definitive conceptualization of American triumphalism can also be seen in *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* by David Martin-Jones, in which the author points out examples within American films such as "Star Wars" and "Saving Private Ryan" of the reaffirmation of American Triumphalism which took place before, during and after U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Cultural studies plays an important role in these pages, as it centers its lens on the ways that a society produces meaning. Meaning production is integral to both the explanation for the occurrence of addiction/alcoholism, and for understanding how the phenomenon of recovery from addiction developed within American culture. In the field



of cultural studies, a particularly pertinent strand has been outlined by sociologist Scott Lash, in his 2007 article "Power after Hegemony: Cultural Studies in Mutation?" from *Theory, Culture, and Society*. In this article, Lash contends that hegemony, the base concept of Cultural Studies, as articulated by Hoggart and Williams and other members of the British school, is undergoing change and becoming more internalized, as "power within" rather than as "power over." (Lash, 2007) Again such phrasing resonates strongly with the notion of a "power greater than" oneself which can only be found "deep down within" (Wilson 1976) as articulated in *Alcoholics Anonymous* literature. The work of such cultural studies pioneers as: Theodor Adorno (1991), whose argument regarding the stultifying effect of the culture industry on people's ability to think critically shapes my inquiry; Max Horkheimer (1947), especially his examination of the subjective reason and its effect on critical thinking and the maintenance of the status quo; Erich Fromm (1941) who delineates the problem of how to live free from cultural domination; and Herbert Marcuse (1999, 1991)- whose work on the connections between the philosophy of Hegel, cultural theory, and the ways that capitalism seeks to restrict the

capacity to oppose it - all inform the research here on addiction and consumption as well.

### **G. Research: Problem and Methodology**

The purpose of this dissertation is to look at the ways in which the twelve step model responds to culturally-defined pathologies and in turn fosters transformation at the socio-cultural level. So far most studies have focused on the use of the twelve step model for the rehabilitation of drug addicts, alcoholics, and other sufferers from obsessive and compulsive behaviors. What the previous research neglects to look at is the element of American triumphalist religiosity and the underlying structures of dominance which give rise to these behaviors, as well as the ways in which the twelve steps actively confront these structures in a discursive, liberative manner. My research is designed to interrogate 1) what the growing incidence of twelve step programs to treat forms of addiction and other obsessive/compulsive behaviors reflects about the ongoing health and viability of American triumphalist culture as embodied in its class structures; 2) how this recovery movement affects the dominant group's ability to maintain control; and 3) whether, in fact, the twelve step model,

through the process of ethical self-examination is having an actual critical and ultimately transformative effect on the ideology of dominance that is American triumphalism. In order to pursue this path of research it was helpful to examine archival material which is located in the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous. This office is located in New York City, and I made a visit, at which time I examined this material, both written and audio-recorded, looking for insight into the initial development of the twelve step model. My research method also involved engagement in ethnographic research concentrating on observation and interviewing of members of Twelve Step groups.

Alcoholics Anonymous employs the tool of discourse as its primary technology for achieving the goal of spiritual awakening. According to the wording of the Twelfth Step, upon realization of this awakening as the result of the previous steps, members seek to carry the message of recovery to other alcoholics and to practice the principles of recovery-honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, brotherly love, justice, perseverance, spirituality, and service-in all their

affairs. As discourse is the primary technology, study of AA lends itself to ethnography. By engaging people in the rooms, or meetings, hearing the descriptions of their lives as recovering persons, I was able to make note of how they themselves made sense of the world through the application of the Steps. Basically, I looked at this particular group of (mostly) recovering alcoholics and addicts, particularly regarding the ways in which they applied these steps and their corresponding principles to their recovery process, and attempted to systematically describe these steps and the resultant experiences as engaged in by the participants.

My research is a product of an insider's perspective. During the collection of data and writing of this dissertation there was always the concern with violating the tradition of anonymity that is so valuable to Alcoholics Anonymous; even if I decide to compromise my own anonymous position, I have no right to endanger another's. The approach I used has its advantages in terms of reaching an understanding of the phenomenon of recovery from the point of view of the participants. One advantage is the access to the people I am writing about that I have had for

over twenty seven years. Thus, I have taken measures to protect anonymity by never using real names and obscuring some details that might make it possible to identify the narrator of any particular anecdote.

My approach is a phenomenological, rather than a positivist, methodology. It is qualitative (based on verbal data), rather than quantitative (based on numerical data). To the extent that I have been able, my research and collection of this data has been conducted within the rooms of Twelve Step meetings, and also in conversation and shared activities (mainly meals, but also one on one activities and celebrations of sobriety milestones) outside the rooms. I have been fortunate to be able to study my subject within its social and cultural contexts, which hopefully lends to the authenticity of the data.

My fieldwork was conducted in three primary locations, all within Southern California: Long Beach for fourteen years, West Los Angeles/Hollywood/Venice for 4 years, and Riverside for 7 years. During this time I have gained valuable insight into the ways in which the people of those communities of recovery have been transformed, but the difficulty in showing this transformation and its impact on

culture persists. I am concerned that my data may be biased in two ways: 1) in that my participation in the phenomenon of recovery has influenced both my observations and my subjects' behavior (as a practitioner of the Twelve Steps myself, my own sobriety is dependent on helping others work the program, and as a result, achieve a spiritual awakening of their own), and 2) that my own beliefs about the transformational capacity of the TSRM are too subjective, based as they are on my personal experience.

## **Chapter 1: Recovery as a Solution to Selfishness**

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action. This is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism.  
~ (Anonymous 1939)

The Twelve Step Recovery Model has been instrumental in the restoration to wholeness of millions of lives around the world, many thousands of which are lived in the United States of America, where, not coincidentally, the Twelve Step movement began. Formed in 1935 by a New York stockbroker, Bill Wilson, and an Akron physician, Bob Smith, who met as a result of their common suffering from alcoholism and interest in sobriety, Alcoholics Anonymous, the original Twelve Step group, has spawned a number of offshoot groups which have also used the twelve steps as a framework for addressing other serious life-destroying issues. It is within this framework that I am seeking to examine the effect of this movement on American culture and on a crucial group within this culture, namely white, middle class Americans. This group is pivotal in the maintenance and legitimization of American triumphalist capitalism. Though there is no evidence that the co-

founders of the original program, AA, intended to serve only this group, the middle class, which consisted mostly of white men and women, they certainly drew from its ranks for their key membership in the early days. What was innovative about this model was the approach it took to communal assets. It eschewed the ownership of any property and anything that had to do with the making of a profit on either the individual or communal level. In effect, AA set itself up in contrast to American capitalism, as co-founder Bill Wilson reasoned that this was the only way to avoid the problem of the individualistic egoism that was at the root of alcoholism. This position is made clear in the Sixth Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous, (the Traditions being the guiding principles of the fellowship as a whole), which states that AA groups "ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose." (Anonymous 156)

In examining the twelve step recovery model in its discursive, liberative elements it is helpful to see this model as a second-order cybernetics system, (a system which guides by information and feedback from information), with the goal-state of liberating those who choose to utilize



it from the dominance of addiction. In turn this examination relies on the presupposition of interdependence and mutuality among individuals and groups as necessary components of a functional system. (Laszlo, 1972, 14-15) Systems, as examined here, are webs of interconnectedness. All systems have common properties, behaviors, and patterns that can be interrogated for an understanding of even more complex phenomena to see how such systems are ultimately connected to one unified, over-arching system, i.e., the Universe. (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, German philosopher, asserted that what humans had referred to as God, at least in western religions, was the spirit of the universe or mind positing itself in dialectical stages that then synthesize into new stages that again arrange themselves in dialectic tension. What resonates in Hegel's philosophy as it pertains to the Twelve Step Recovery Model is the particular emphasis on contradictory states. In Hegel's view, this contradictory state is necessary for growth. Just so is this true of the Twelve Step Recovery Model, in which the alcoholic/addict has to come to terms with the dissonance between the way things are and the way things need to be in order for him to have any chance at a life.

Thus the alcoholic is caught in a dilemma; no fulfillment is ever enough. In fact, using Hegel's dialectical framework, the desire to achieve fulfillment becomes an obstacle in itself. The alcoholic must find something that fulfills his desire and so keeps seeking a substance or process that will do the job. As Carl Jung is said to have observed, in a 1961 response to a letter from AA co-founder Bill Wilson, the craving for alcohol is "the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God." (Jung, 2011) This search is the dialectic corollary to the Spirit searching for itself in Hegel's construct. The alcoholic/addict seeks to move from a current stage of discontent to one of fruition, the way that such stages supplant each other as described by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (Hegel, 1807) These stages are of necessity contradictory, yet also contingent; Hegel's example for this is the bud being supplanted by the flower, and the flower in turn being supplanted by, negated by, the fruit. Thus these stages are parts of a necessary holistic process whose completion (fruition) is the fruit. Consequently, in the language of the Twelve Step recovery model, it is when the human will aligns itself with its Higher Power, or

Spirit, that it truly achieves freedom. This phenomenon of the will working in tandem with the Higher Power is an example of an open system, a system that interacts with its environment.

In turn, one of the applications of the Twelve Step recovery model, at least on the individual level, is as an instrument of critical systems theory analysis. The inventory process produces a practical social theory for each practitioner which allows them to engage in self-assessment. This sort of critical social theory is used to create a knowledge structure in which systems of domination can be understood and theorized with the goal of gaining freedom from such systems. (Bell, 2008) How is this self-reflective knowledge attained? How does the Twelve Step recovery model provide for the attainment of self-reflective knowledge and does it lead to release from entrapment in systems of domination? Let us explore this question further by examining the Twelve Steps through the lens of systems theory. Systems theory combines four domains: philosophy, hypothesis, methodology, and action. The first two domains combine to provide knowledge, while the second set of domains combines to provide action. All told, these four domains involve themselves in a theory of

knowledgeable action. The twelve step recovery model is itself a system of knowledgeable action, used cybernetically, that is, to 'steer' or govern, those who practice the system. Cybernetics as a field involves the study of feedback and concepts such as communication and control. It is the study of the ways in which a system regulates itself and in turn, those who make up the system. In the cybernetic system that is the twelve step recovery model, the individual or group entity processes information about itself culled from the inventory process, and then reacts and responds to this information in the amends steps, and finally makes further adjustments and responses to ongoing informational stimuli in the maintenance steps. Additionally, the twelve step model, by nature of its emphasis on ethical self-assessment, offers an antidote and a countervailing force to "socio-cybernetic processes" (Raven, 1995), processes designed to control and dominate humans. These socio-cybernetic processes also function to demoralize meaningful communal attempts to counteract the dualistic thinking that is at present helping to set humanity on a course that at best undermines human well-being, and could indeed lead to annihilation. A key example of these processes is the intentional defense of the

despoliation of the planet in the name of profit and comfort mounted by consumption-addicted corporations and individuals at the expense of those whose basic needs thus go unmet. Western culture and the U.S. in particular consume enormous amounts of the planet's resources and justify doing so through the delusion that there is a spiritual mandate calling for humans to "have dominion" over the planet. Only clear-sighted ethical self-assessment can counteract this sort of religious rationalization and its deleterious impact.

One transformative element of the twelve step model is evidenced in the way that it enables the clarification of positions as either false or real, depending on the accuracy of details, rather than on convention. In doing the work of ethical self-assessment, the practitioner gets to see how beliefs are created and fostered. Thus the twelve step recovery model, in its various manifestations, is interacting with and having a transformative effect on American capitalist culture. How has this issue been studied? So far, primarily through observation of both twelve step programs and the American culture they operate within. In my own case I have engaged in the study of religion as a cultural phenomenon in the American context.

Much of what I have written and researched has been targeted toward the relationship between religion in general and cultural construction in particular. I am also engaged in an analysis of the human interactions that contribute both to the phenomenon of alcoholism and to the larger manifestations of this phenomenon as they are evidenced in the American culture. This analysis utilizes the concepts of habitus and social capital as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, looking at ways that these concepts operate in tension with the recovery milieu and how this interaction is liberative. I also use data drawn from the foundational literature of the original twelve step group, Alcoholics Anonymous, and analyze this input as a phenomenon of American white, middle-class culture. Additionally, I continue to engage in observation of people in recovery in my role as a participant observer, collecting data while maintaining the anonymity of informants.

A main focus in this research is the pluralistic, non-hierarchical interconnectedness (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) of the Twelve Step recovery model as distinguished from hierarchical and linear structures of power. One very important aspect of the Twelve Step model in this sense is

the flexibility and mutability that it enables through a normative/non-normative dialectic, which allows those using the model to make adjustments and "let go" of old ideas, beliefs and behaviors that are no longer useful. The Twelve Step model in essence is useful in challenging the essentiality claimed by those who rely on such normative structures to maintain status quo.

To look at the situation from a causal perspective, it is helpful to examine the factors that contribute to the incidence of, and increase in, these addictive and obsessive-compulsive behaviors that the Twelve Step model seeks to treat. From Webster's II New College Dictionary comes this definition of recovery: "a return to a normal condition." Interestingly, there is also this definition, which may in fact be closest to what the process of recovery from alcoholism/addiction is really about: "The act of obtaining usable substances from unusable sources, as waste material." The Twelve Steps have contributed to the redemption of human beings who have been considered to be 'waste material' by most societal standards, and transformed them into useful individuals. To aid in understanding this contribution I think it is fitting to

include a brief history of the origins of Alcoholics Anonymous, the original Twelve Step fellowship.

#### The Origins of Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous developed in 1935 out of the interaction of its co-founders, Bill W. (Wilson) and Dr. Bob (Smith), with an earlier movement known as the Oxford Group. The Oxford Group had in turn been founded by Lutheran minister Frank Buchman, who conceived the notion of returning to the principles of first century Christianity after a conversion experience in a Keswick, England chapel in 1921. (Driberg 1965) In fact, the movement was first called A First Century Christian Fellowship at inception, but came to be known as the Oxford Group later. This is how Bill W. refers to it when he tells of his own conversion experience and the subsequent nascency of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935. Later the Oxford Group would be referred to as Moral Re-Armament.

The Oxford Group's focus was on morality, rather than sobriety, per se, but its connection to AA was forged when Ebby Thacher, an ex-drinking partner of Bill Wilson, introduced the program to his friend one afternoon in 1934, when, as Wilson tells us in "Bill's Story", (Anonymous



2001) he was on his last "debauch." (8) Wilson relates the story of his friend Ebby's visit to share his newfound sobriety. Wilson's first thought was that his friend had become a religious "crackpot" (9) but was desperate enough to listen to what Ebby had to say about the solution to his drinking problem. Wilson began attending Oxford Group Meetings in New York, and had managed to stay sober for 6 months when he found himself in a hotel lobby in Akron, Ohio, desperately craving alcohol. The business deal that had brought Wilson to Akron had failed, and he was seriously considering taking a drink when he had the inspiration to call a local hospital looking for a drunk to talk to. This evangelistic strategy for staying sober was adapted from one of the key tenets of the Oxford Group, "personal evangelism -- one man talking to another or one woman discussing her problems with another woman..." Although Wilson had been unsuccessful in his first half-dozen or so attempts to get a drunk to sober up, he had managed to stay sober himself, and so he gave it another try. He found himself soon in contact with Dr. Bob Smith, an erstwhile successful Akron physician whose alcoholism had progressed to the point that he was about to lose his practice and his home. Wilson convinced Smith to let him stop by for a visit

(after prodding by Smith's long-suffering wife Anne, who, along with Wilson's wife Lois are revered as co-founder of the Alanon Family Groups, the companion Twelve Step program for relatives and friends of alcoholics), and after several hours the two made the connection which sparked the nascence of the Twelve Step movements that are today so ubiquitous in American culture, and increasingly western culture as a whole. One result of the influence of the Twelve Step recovery model which developed out of this encounter is in the category of agency, as people are starting to see that in order to recover from their addictions, or compulsive behaviors, or any situations that they find themselves in that are ultimately oppressive, they must reorganize their approach to life, becoming less selfish and more altruistic.

The Twelve Steps can be viewed as an alternative medium for the transference of cultural knowledge, one that offers a different approach to constructing and maintaining cultural artifacts. This alternative transference takes place as participants, "having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, carry the message" of this alternative to others. This alternative is a form of critical theorizing, performed by "organic intellectuals"

(Gramsci 1992) which performs two functions: 1) the production of knowledge and 2) the distribution of knowledge. The Twelve Steps provide the grounding for such organic theorizing, as each participant in the Steps is engaged in their own personal cultural criticism, assessing their perspectives on the culture that they are embedded in, their experience of that culture, and the transference of the knowledge of their old way of life and the new culture of recovery on to other participants.

Pierre Bourdieu's work on habitus and the symbolic, coercive violence implicit in the mundane structures of society, particularly in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice and Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, also informs this project. Bourdieu was engaged in the exploration of the inner workings of social hierarchies: how they were constructed and maintained. He denies the preeminence that Marx attributed to economic resources and their control in the establishment of these systems, asserting that this process was much more dependent on the ability of individuals and groups in society to promote their particular beliefs and practices through the use of symbols and rhetoric to control the

discourse of social construction. In his analysis it was this use of symbols, often accompanied by claims as to the ontological nature of those systems that the symbols represented, which legitimized and maintained the existing social constructs.

## **Chapter Two: An Elaboration on the Theory Behind Twelve Step Recovery and a Power Greater Than Oneself**

What gives the TSR model its transformative potential and allows it to work as a systematic ethic is the conscious acknowledgement that whatever power for good exists, whatever authority one truly answers to, can ultimately be contacted only "deep within" oneself (55).

The triumph of the therapeutic, a concept that Rieff alludes to, is a two-part phenomenon. One component of this triumph is the notion that talking about one's problems is therapeutic. The second component, also mirroring the principles outlined in the Steps, is the concept of individual responsibility for one's problems and for one's solution. Both of these elements are present in the Twelve Step Recovery Model as well and are key ingredients in the notion of cultural change as Rieff articulated it. There are hints in the program literature that A.A. co-founder, Bill Wilson considered the possibility of applying the twelve step principles to societal issues in just such a way: "Though the essays which follow were written mainly for members, it is thought by many of A.A.'s friends that these pieces might arouse interest and find application

outside A.A. itself." (Anonymous, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 16) Rieff was cognizant of this type of stirring within society. Triumph is centered around this notion that "in order to understand how tensions between social and cultural structures exert 'pressures for change' (Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, New York, 1962, p. 122) it may be necessary to develop a theory of tensions within a culture." (Rieff, 6, fn 8) This dissertation is an attempt to accomplish such a goal.

The Twelve Step Recovery Model serves as a theoretical critique of the tensions inherent in American culture. "Whenever therapeutic elites grow predominantly critical then a cultural revolution is said to be in progress." (Rieff, 15) The twelve steps can be likened to "...cultic therapies [religions?] [which] consist[ ] in participation mystiques [rituals?] severely limiting deviant initiatives." (Ibid.) In this sense, the TSRM can be viewed as cultic therapy, the steps as participation mystiques, rituals, which serve to severely limit deviant initiatives, i.e., addictive behavior.

The TSRM is a form of "positive...asceticism-aimed fundamentally at a liberation of the highest powers of personality from blockage by the automatism of the lower

drives." (*ibid.*) The steps are designed to give the practitioner access to a higher power which frees him from the addictive behavior, i.e., the automatic lower drives, by clearing the path between the self and its higher powers. This takes place through a process that includes renunciation, asceticism, ethical self-assessment, and restitution and which also entails continuing efforts at re-assessment and re-connection with one's higher powers, or Higher Power, as the twelve step nomenclature is stated.

In *Triumph* Rieff bemoans the crisis of culture he claims has taken place in modernity. This crisis involves the replacement of old forms of authority and authoritarianism embodied by religious institutions with a 'new' culture of acceptance and permissiveness. Rieff was writing these words at a time, the mid-1960's, of great social upheaval. His trepidation, I assert, is misplaced, however, for it is never wrong to challenge illegitimate authority while seeking to establish new forms of authority grounded in authentically legitimate forms based on mutual cooperation and inter-connectedness. This atmosphere of cooperation is evident in the organizational principles of the original twelve step program, Alcoholics Anonymous, principles embodied in the Twelve Traditions. These

traditions, which were designed to guide relationships among individual recovering alcoholics and the group, as well as inter-group relationships and relationships with society-at-large, are listed here:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. (Anonymous 1953)



The suspicion of authority that Rieff decries is really more a disdain for the illegitimate use of authority. The TSRM enables a connection to legitimate uses of authority, those untainted by desires to exploit and driven by self-seeking profit motives. Through the TSRM, new communities are being established which are legitimately seeking to improve the lives of their members. The disempowering of the old forms of authority is a necessary step if the world's marginalized are to be given a chance for freedom from oppression. But the marginalized themselves must participate in their own empowerment, and the TSRM offers them an opportunity to do so, in the form of radical self-assessment of their lives and the parts they play in their subjugation. How does the TSRM provide for the attainment of self-reflective knowledge and does it lead to release from entrapment in systems of domination? I would argue that indeed this is the very result.

Another question arises in this context of the traditions: What is the connection between Hegel's idea of

absolute reason and the organization of the state, on the one hand, and the liberative conscientization that is the product of the TSRM? "It would be folly to try and force on a people arrangements and institutions toward which it [the people, society-at-large] has not progressed by itself." (Hegel 1983) This quote of Hegel's resonates with the stated principle of "attraction rather than promotion" from the AA traditions (Anonymous, 1953). It can be asserted 'along Hegelian lines' that the impetus for social transformation embodied in the TSRM is a reflection of the "move towards justice and equilibrium of the rational state" that Lakeland references in his comparison of Hegel and Whitehead regarding liberation theology. (Lakeland 1986) Recovering individuals are the finite manifestation of the Spirit, seeking to posit itself, through them, in an existence both rational and just. "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we...carried this message to others and practiced these principles in all our affairs." (Anonymous, 60) 'All our affairs' includes affairs of the state, or society-at-large in this reading. But how does this interpretation interact with the AA preamble, which reminds recovering members that the fellowship "is not allied with any sect, denomination,

politics, organization, or institution" (AA Grapevine 1947) and that this means that those in recovery are to remain apolitical. The answer is that certainly the AA fellowship must maintain its independent stance concerning involvement in such issues; however, there is nothing in the language of the text that precludes actions taken by the individual recovering person. Alcoholic Anonymous Number Three, as he is identified in the Big Book (Anonymous 1981), relates how he sobered up and became involved in politics himself. The gist of the situation is that the steps are designed to give one access to their own Higher Power; as this takes place the recoverer is guided from within by an "unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves. (Anonymous *ibid.*) Hegel's Spirit, manifesting itself in the world, is such an unsuspected inner resource.

Taylor, in examining Hegel, (Taylor 1979), intimates that the solution to the dilemma of a society- comprised of groups of individuals, groups necessary to the successful construction of said society, but who are in tension with calls for equity, homogenization, and unity-is in allowing autonomy to these groups while still establishing some common purpose which unites them all. The emerging forces

of nationalism in the nineteenth century were not adequate to the task, in Hegel's estimation. The TSRM indicates, in its organizational structure as established in the Twelve Traditions, its potential as such a unifying force while still allowing the competing individuals and groups to remain autonomous: "Each group shall remain autonomous except in matters concerning other groups or [the overarching group] as a whole." (Anonymous 1953)

As long as men identify themselves as producers participating in the large collaborative enterprise, that is, as long as this conception of man is of fundamental importance to them, and is least one of the conceptions out of which they determine the significance things have for them, so long does a society with these institutions maintain its cohesion. Alienation rises when this identity ships, when men can no longer easily define themselves by this conception. (Taylor 1979)

As capitalism continues to expand and take hold of more resources, while also concentrating this production in ever tighter structures of corporate control, people feel less and less that they are participating in the deliberative, distributive process on a meaningful level. Some may be satisfied with just being consumers/wage servants, but others sense the increasing emptiness of this prospect and turn to other ways to fill this emptiness, by consuming addictive substances and or engaging in addictive

processes. The cohesion of society further deteriorates. The TSRM is useful in helping people to reconnect, or connect for the first time, even, with that "unsuspected inner resource" (Anonymous 1981) that gives meaning to their existence, not the least by providing a sense of connectedness with a community of fellow 'aliens', all those who have experienced alienation from society and yet are attempting to turn away from the destructive impulses of their addictions and construct a new community of meaning. The problem remains that if the emphasis of their recovery is on returning them to the status quo of participant in an unsatisfactory situation, one already found to be wanting in terms of meaning, this recovery may not be sustainable. "The message which can interest and hold these ...people must have depth and weight." (Anonymous 1981) For this recovery model to work, there must be the possibility of real transformation, on both individual and societal levels. Being restored to sanity- the second step in the twelve steps- is being restored to wholeness. This means living a truthful, authentic life connected to Spirit, as Hegel connotes it. If one were to merely return to the same dissatisfactory situation previously experienced, in which Spirit is not

nurtured, (because to nurture the spirit would mean turning away from a facile life of consumption for consumption's sake), one would be left bereft of the possibility of living a different, less selfish, more fulfilling life. In such a situation of failure to enlarge one's "spiritual life" (Anonymous *ibid.*) the chance of real recovery is diminished, "less than average." (*ibid.*) For recovery to work, there must exist the capacity to be honest, and if persons are forced to deny truths about the contradictions inherent in the way of life they are participating in, this capacity to be honest is affected negatively. Then one must turn to a power not so great as one's personal integrity, a lesser god, so to speak, in order to reconcile oneself to this contradictory condition.

### **Hegel's Geist (Spirit) as Higher Power**

Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit*, ethics, overcomes the conceptual limitations of the accepted forms of societal construction by seeing the world, or society, as Spirit positing itself, and in doing so allows for a new analysis of the development of society. When the operating program is based on perpetual growth, and this basis precludes imagining systems that are geared toward sustainability,

then these conceptual limitations exist. An examination of the ontologies of such an existing system as offered by the TSRM, based on Hegel's notion of Spirit as Higher Power, allows for a breaking through or a transcendence of this conceptual limitation, of the necessity for perpetual growth no matter what, to be replaced by solutions to contemporary problems such as poverty, pollution, oppression, etc, which are endemic to existing systems. Hegel foresaw the spiritual impoverishment of the masses because of the increasingly complex modes of production engendered by the Industrial Revolution. The work that most people were given to do was monotonous and provided them with little of real meaning, and lead to the state of alienation that many found themselves in. Religion, as Marx famously pointed out, came to be the antidote for this state of affairs:

Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man—state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement,

and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo. (Marx, 1844)

How does the TSRM function both like a religion, for those who practice it, and yet also as a way to "give up a condition that requires illusions? Like a religion, the TSRM provides people with "a design for living that works in rough going" (Anonymous 1981), giving a frame of meaning to their existence. Yet what differentiates the TSRM from other religious paradigms is that the goal is much more immediate- the reduction of suffering through sobriety, a liberation from addiction as opposed to the other-worldly goal of most other religions. Granted, these religions are also guides to freedom from the bondage of self, paths to liberation and enlightenment in their own right, but what they offer primarily is an other-worldly soteriology. The



TSRM is focused on salvation from addiction and living a redeemed life in the here and now.

There exists a sort of push/pull within the Twelve Step Recovery Model between and around the functions of a) restoring stability and form to people's lives, i.e. helping them get back the material things they lost while in the throes of their disease, and b) offering them a way to transform their lives completely. As I argue in this dissertation, the TSRM was originally conceived to bring alcoholics back into the mainstream of the culture, and yet it is arguably contributing to the transformation of the culture itself. Through the ethical self-assessment process of the steps practitioners can find themselves able to articulate new boundaries and ways of living that are unchained from their old ways of life as they wish them to be. It is the discovery of connection to the Spirit, or Higher Power, through the Twelve Steps, that gives meaning to the individual. Just so is the TSRM conceived as a method of accessing a power which is only found deep within oneself, and the access to this power frees, liberates from the bondage of the deluded self, the self bound to external authority, without the autonomy to choose what to follow.

Alienation plays a key role in the addictive process. "This [alienation] comes about when the public experience of my society ceases to have any meaning for me." (88) This alienation leads to addiction as the way to deal with the sense of being disconnected from that which is supposed to provide meaning.

Taylor asserts that Hegel's analysis is of continuing usefulness because it "makes possible" the explanation of how contemporary society has developed based on ideas and beliefs, rather than the way political scientists look at development. (Taylor 1979) Hegel attributes these ideas and beliefs as being related to society's evolutionary process. As Taylor states, Hegel's solution "to the problem of Sittlichkeit, the evolution of society founded on the Idea, is a complete non-starter" for contemporary society. (Taylor *ibid.*) But it is his offering of an analysis which keeps Hegel relevant. The key transformative element of the TSRM is its provision of the ability to examine underlying causes and conditions, i.e., why things are the way they are, their ontological nature. Taylor poses the question as to what will be "the underlying conception of man and society which can provide a pole of identification." (133) Perhaps a viable underlying conception can be culled from

individuals and communities which are engaged in ethical self-examination, looking at both old ideas and beliefs and how well they work faced with the exigencies of contemporary life.

Romanticism and expressivism, two related elements in the search for the source of good within that embodied the German and English movements of the late 18th- early 19th century, (Taylor 1989) can be regarded as forms of protest. The yearning for the past or hoping for a different future belie an ability to live at peace with oneself in the present. The TSRM makes being in the present possible, as it allows one to deal with reality from a position of serenity regarding outside conditions.

Self-diremption, a tearing apart or violent separation, is an apt term for the type of alienation from one's self-expression, i.e., work and its product, the constructed environment, that takes place in the capitalist class-structure. This alienation can only be alleviated by gaining back control of one's own agency in the production process, control over the fruits of one's labor. This regaining of control can only be accomplished with an awareness of the loss of control and/or the knowledge that agency can be re-established. Such an awareness can only

come from examination at depth of the pre-suppositions that both individuals and groups base their operant thoughts and actions on. (Will and life.) In the third of the twelve steps one makes the decision to turn one's will and life over to the care of a higher power of one's own understanding. Since this power is only found, "in the last analysis," (Anonymous, 55) deep within the individual's being, successfully surrendering one's will and life through the practice of the subsequent steps of inventory and amends can lead one to a radical freedom from structural dominance.

Individual change is crucial; structural change is essential to the process of reintegration and de-alienation. Social knowledge, then, stemming from self-knowledge, is potentially liberating. It is counteractive to the practice of forgetting the past, or repression, which can be useful in the positive sense as a filtering process, but can also serve as a "faculty of check," or repression. (Nietzsche, 63) Memory is the antidote to this forgetfulness, according to Nietzsche, and is necessary so that decisions can be made regarding the future, decisions based on remembered experiences of the past. Morality, then, becomes established, based on

tradition informed by this remembered experience, a "morality of custom" (65) that functioned oppositionally to the moral systems propounded by Christianity and Buddhism. Is it possible to take a moral inventory on the corporate level? Could society benefit from such an exercise? Yes, if the claim is true that "our troubles...are ... of our own making." (Anonymous, 62) Humans play a part in their own problems, according to this model, and, this being the case, it is important for the individual and/or the group to look at past actions, ideas, and beliefs, as well as ongoing processes and policies, in order to discern how best to "shape a sane and sound ideal for [a] future...life." (Ibid, 69) Society, American society in particular "...[b]y positioning the normal social drinker midway between the problem, alcoholic drinker and the person who abstains, ...has driven its obsession with self-control into the mind of every man and woman who comes in contact with alcohol." (Denzin, 4) American society is obsessed with controlling not only itself, but the outcome of events on a global level. This obsession contributes to addictive behavior. But where does this obsession to control come from? Does this obsession and the addictive behavior that follows from it stem, as Malcolm Lowry would have it, from "...the

complete baffling sterility of existence as sold to ...” (Lowry, 1984) those who partake in American society and especially those who pursue the American dream? Denzin is clear in pointing out the underlying tensions regarding the constructed myth operating within American society that alcohol and other substance and process consumption point to, as it is “...the mythical social drinker...who drinks normally...[that] epitomizes America’s relationship with alcohol, alcoholism, and the alcoholic.” (Denzin, 4)

Central to my thesis is this point that the American myth, with its ideology of self-control and rugged individualism is a causal element in the proliferation of addictive behaviors and the corresponding co-dependence of the vast majority (some estimates are as high as 97%) of Americans. If then, as Lowry claims, the world is ‘bafflingly sterile’ for the alcoholic in particular, what can be extrapolated from such a condition regarding the lived experience of those others who also suffer from addictive behaviors and compulsions, and how much of this has to do with the way their worlds are constructed? Why is it that so many, especially in what is argued by its constituents to be the most successful society ever constructed, feel the need to alter their consciousness of this lived experience? This

can be interpreted as a very compelling imperative to control one's relationship with the world and appears to be endemic to, even part of, the structure of the social order.

Such a society, characterized as itself alcoholic, is unable to live in the present, mentally. It is always resenting (re-sensing) the past and or worrying about the future. Paradoxically, the attitude of this society toward its own construction bears elements of historical denial regarding the high price paid by some members (Native Americans, African slaves and their descendents, women, the poor) to achieve its present position. This denial is also reflected in society's attitude towards alcohol and tobacco use, and in a related sense, its attitude toward corporate malfeasance. The negative effects of this attitude and the history overlooked as a result are obscured in the minds of those who have benefitted from such exploitation, as well as those who are convinced by their denial that their own interests are being served by avoiding the present conditions of those dominated historically. But this avoidance comes at a price. There must be some mechanism to obscure the awareness of such a contradictory position, and that is where alcoholism/addiction comes into play, serving

as that mechanism. For many, this state of obscured awareness becomes so necessary to their existence that without it they feel ill at ease. "Psychological, symbolic, or phenomenological craving arises when the subject feels a compelling need, or desire, to drink or use, irrespective of (and often in the absence of) any [physical] withdrawal symptom." (Denzin, 34) An obsession to maintain this condition of obscured awareness takes root, and results in continuance of the addictive behavior in order to avoid the psychological, symbolic, or phenomenological craving. On a societal level, such an impetus to avoid feeling empty leads to sometimes desperate measures. Nearly unanimous support for military action to preserve a society's access to resources fits into this conceptual framework. Just as the addict continues the addictive behavior to avoid the return of the craving (emptiness), even in the face of dire consequences for such behavior, so the addicted society continues its behavior, harmful to itself and to the rest of the world. The addictive behavior continues, aided by the denial of its citizens, in order to maintain its self-concept as superior, and its conceit in being able to remain the dominant agent in the world. (38) American culture encourages addictive behavior that borders on the



risky; speculation is endemic to the culture, especially when the risks can be passed on to the lower classes in the consumption /class-structure. As Madsen (1974) and Bateson (1972a) both maintain as well, the alcoholic/addict "is a reflection of the society, the history, and the culture of which he or she is a member." (Denzin, 44) The Twelve Steps offer a way out of this unsustainable, Cartesian-dualistic dilemma. (Denzin, 52, re: Bateson, 1972a, 33) The Twelve Step recovery model makes possible the breaking of the hold that the dominant forces of American culture, including its scientific and religious as well as commercial components, have over the ongoing process of societal construction.

Denzin also refers to the alcoholically divided self (121-122) as one which experiences an existence marked by a "distorted" inner stream of consciousness and a painful, often bruised, bloated, and diseased body he or she lives from within." American society reflects this condition, in the sense that it operates within a structure that is distorted by denial (and subconscious guilt over this denial), and is constantly attempting to deny the fact that it is slipping further into an increasingly insupportable situation. American culture actively promotes, sometimes in concealed fashion, the consumptive lifestyle which

contributes to the many substance and process addictions that afflict an ever-increasing number of its participants. As these processes continue and become more deeply embedded in day-to-day existence, society is forced out of its established equilibrium of dysfunctional status quo, and violence erupts, or some crisis is provoked which necessitates a "radical restructuring" (135) of the relationship between the (alcoholic) culture and those who it is in relationship with. In the scenario I am suggesting, American culture is the "alcoholic" and the "other" is the rest of the world. The "other", primarily for reasons of survival, have become "enablers" for this dominant, 'alcoholic' culture, allowing it to continue its dysfunctional behavior of controlling and exploiting the 'other's' resources.

Unlike the alcoholic, however, American culture has no one to police its behavior, realistically speaking. The United Nations and other world organizations are supposed to serve in this capacity, but are too embedded with and emasculated by the United States to keep her in line. At some point, the dominant party's need for control of so many resources, and the extractive and damaging behavior that accompanies such an over-whelming compulsion, will

precipitate real crises of violence, political, social, and ecological in nature. The 'other' will in turn be compelled to take action to save themselves. Their denial system will be impeded, to say the least. (Please note that I am not asserting that all elements of the 'other' are in denial to the same extent, or even at all; many are well aware of how harmful the dominant society's actions are, but find themselves powerless to do anything of substance about this situation.) At a certain point, they will no longer be able to participate with the system as designed. (Evidence of this necessity to revolt is available ubiquitously, but more specifically it can be seen in the uprisings taking place in Northern Africa and the Middle East.)

The 'alcoholic' culture, in turn, will be forced out of its own position of denial regarding the harm done to the rest of the world by their actions, and forced as well to take a look at the damage it has itself sustained. What may likely occur, of course, is that the dysfunctional culture will continue operating as long as possible, even blaming the 'other' for any problems the system is experiencing. This situation is represented in part by the current 'war on terror'; those who have been victimized

most by the addictive, violently extractive behavior are labelled as 'terrorists.' This in no way condones any violence perpetrated by the other; understanding why such violence occurs is perhaps the only viable avenue to achieving the cessation of such violence. Many within the culture are already aware of how noxious it is, both for themselves and the rest of the world. At some point, these crises will have to be dealt with; further denial will only lead to more catastrophes, even worse than the banking crisis or the Deepwater Horizon disaster and its aftermath. But as long as the 'alcoholic' culture is able to pass the blame on to others (e.g., environmentalists, terrorists, etc.), change will be slow in coming. Circumstances will become increasingly dire as the culture of dominance takes a more defensive and entrenched position. Scapegoating of certain groups, such as gays, immigrants, and Muslims will increase. (This is already taking place as evidenced by attacks, both physical- the shooting of Congresswoman Giffords in Arizona- and rhetorical- such as the campaigns of discrimination masked as amendments like Proposition 8 or the debate over the "Ground Zero" mosque,- can attest to.)

As conditions worsen, the 'alcoholic' culture reaches a point which is so intolerable that it has to make a choice: either to continue on the same course, maintaining the status quo (which, ironically, only makes things worse) or, admit that this situation is unsustainable and accept help. In the TSRM, this help comes from a higher power, which is accessed through the practice of the steps. The admission of defeat, of powerlessness, is crucial to the process of recovery. Without this admission, the alcoholic lacks the requisite humility to see that the conventional (constructed) manner of operating in the world is no longer tenable. With this admission of defeat, positive change becomes possible.

Thus, as the TSRM becomes ever more utilized in all of its manifestations throughout the American culture, people are confronting their own experiences of powerlessness and disillusionment with the modes of living that membership in American society requires. They find that they no longer can, or even wish, to live within the "normative" structures this membership entails, and seek out new and authentic modes of living based on mutuality and interdependence, rather than individualism and independence. As they begin and continue to practice the

Twelve Steps they come to embrace the principles of love and service that these steps offer as a path of liberation from the bondage of self. A movement of spiritual renewal, one directed not by powerful oligarchs compelled to coerce, dominate, and extract resources from the many for the benefit of the few, but by individuals joined in the practical knowledge that the best way to serve oneself is by being of service to another, can take hold and bring hope and pragmatic solutions to the suffering caused by the current culture of selfishness. There are those who, fearfully convinced that the only way that their own needs can be met is by maintaining the dominant structures, will do everything in their power to thwart such transformation. And, to be sure, this transformation will not happen overnight. But the element of hope in this conflict is that those who are fighting to oppose this transformation are deep down inside filled with the same goodness that is embodied in those who are already on this path of transformation. This goodness cannot, ultimately, be thwarted. The evidence for this bold assertion is the countless lives already altered in such a positive way by the process of the TSRM.

The steps provide the opportunity for a "reflexive self-awareness" (Denzin, 167) which allows human beings to position themselves in reality, and helps them to avoid the pitfalls of delusional and grandiose thinking that make the dominance of others possible and seemingly necessary. When a person is looking at his or her own life from a clear perspective it is much more difficult to believe and act on the idea that another human being is here only to be exploited. This process also enables an assessment of one's level of engagement in the dysfunction endemic to society and what role this engagement plays in their sense of being-as-diseased. This term is perhaps not as complex as it seems. What I mean by this is the knowledge that one's condition has something to do with the tactics one uses to conform to society as constructed, and that these tactics are contrary to what one would choose to do in the best of all possible worlds. The fourth step involves a personal inventory designed to get at the "causes and conditions" of one's addiction. (Wilson, 64) Does the addict/alcoholic engage in the addictive behavior because they are an addict, or are they compelled to do so in order to cope with an ultimately untenable situation, i.e.,

participating, from necessity, in a system that is destructive of spirit?

The goal, then, of the Twelve Steps is to bring about a transformation in the way that the practitioner relates to the world. The question then becomes, could this process work on a larger scale? Could this approach be used viably to change the way an institution, even a nation, engages with the rest of the world? Would the Twelve Steps of Recovery from Addiction to Hegemony look something like this?:

1) We admitted we were powerless over our need to control and extract the world's resources, and that as a result, life, not only for ourselves, but for the rest of the world's inhabitants, was becoming, not just unmanageable, but untenable.

2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. (This Power being that of the spirit of mutuality and inter-connectedness that can only be found, "in the last analysis," (Anonymous, 55) within all human beings.)

3) Made a decision to turn our will (thoughts) and our lives (actions) over to the care of this Power.



4) In order to make such a transformation, we deem it necessary to take a fearless moral inventory of our past and present actions, resentments, angers, and fears, with the goal of "shaping a sane and sound ideal for [the future]." (Wilson, 67)

5) Admitted to this Higher Power, to ourselves, and to our fellow human beings the exact nature of our wrongs.

6) Strove to become willing and to maintain this willingness to have our defects of character, those ways of thinking and acting that once made sense as tactics of survival and conformity to the constructed system, but which have long since ceased to be of use, removed as modes of operating in the world.

7) Humbly asked our Higher Power (as we conceived it) for relief from these outmoded responses and for openness to new ways of operating in the world.

8) Made a list of all the harms we had done in the past and are currently involved in perpetrating, and became willing to set right these wrongs.

9) Made direct amends wherever possible, except when to do so would cause greater harm.

10) Continued to take inventory of our beliefs, thoughts, and actions, and when wrong promptly admitted the wrong and set it right.

11) Sought through prayer, meditation, and open and honest communication to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power, seeking only knowledge of its will for us and the power to carry that out.

12) Having had an awakening to a higher level of consciousness as a result of these steps, we sought to carry this message (through example set by integral action) to others caught up in the snare of the compulsion to control and selfishly extract resources, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Many will protest against such a plan of action. Those who are still bound to their former ways of living, still needing to control and exploit others, will see no reason to change. Even those who might wish to change their approach to life may be daunted by the enormity of the task. But at some point, due to the physical limitations and requirements of the human species for living on the planet, all will feel the effects of the old way of living. They may want to change themm these recalcitrant ones, but

it may be too late, and by that time billions will have paid the price for their recalcitrance.

What hope is there then, for this transformation? The hope, according to adherents of the Twelve Steps, lies within each living human being who has taken part in the creation and maintenance of the current social construct, - some only by their acquiescence to the process, indeed - who comes to the realization of this participation and then chooses to engage in a new process of transformation through the practice of the steps. As the awakening that is the result of the steps begins to unfold, different choices as to the ongoing construction of society become possible, based on principles of mutuality and inter-connectedness. The perceived need to acquiesce to oppressive systems no longer seems necessary, and more positive options become possible. "Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them."

(Anonymous 84)

Adherents assert that the Twelve Steps can work for anyone, regardless of class, status, or power distinctions, if one approaches the process sincerely. The steps by design cannot be used for dishonest purposes or to achieve

a goal that is inauthentic or selfish. This is because the result of the steps is an awakening to the nature of one's true relationship with the Higher Power, and this awareness is not possible if one remains in a state of inauthenticity or selfishness. Freedom from the bondage of self, which is what the steps ultimately provide, is anathema to willful selfishness.

Ressentiment, as it is used by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, is a specific feeling of enmity toward another based on one's inability to do anything about the initial perceived injustice perpetrated by that other. It is a key element of the principle of "slave morality" as Nietzsche develops it in *A Genealogy of Morals*. (Nietzsche, 35) Ressentiment is the basis of a value system that sees the powerful of a society as evil. The construction of a society can contribute to this sense of resentment, and those who are constantly exposed to this enmity resulting from the circumstances of their own lives almost always fail to recognize their own complicity in this construct. To deal with these feelings of "hostility, anger, wrath, and a vengeful joy in the other's misfortunes" (Denzin, 351) which become nearly unbearable, they turn to substances or processes to drown out the consciousness of

those feelings. In the American context, it is this disparity between the expressed ideal of inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all and the lived experience of those whose lives do not match this ideal that underlies resentment. Add to this equation the feelings of guilt and fear that are felt by those who are engaged in the exploitation, the masters, to return to Nietzsche's syntax. These oppressors are also in need of some relief, from their own feelings that something is amiss, their own resentment, which is why many of them also turn to substance and/or process addictions. Ironically, the twelve-step model emanated from and is still embedded in a white, male-dominated milieu whose members are in some ways the most advantaged and least subject to the effects of the disparity between professed ideals and the lived reality of American culture. But the disease of addiction is an emotional as well as physical one, and the expectations of the dominant-group member are high due to the constructed belief in his own superiority. (Painter, 2007) His resentment often comes from these expectations being thwarted in the personal lives of these relatively advantaged, or from the awareness, by some members, of just how great the disparity is for others,

even though they themselves have reaped the benefits of privilege. Some may experience this sensation of things not being quite right in the pressure they feel to conform to the standards set by the dominant culture for measuring success. This need to demonstrate one's successful achievement of cultural standards has been articulated in sociologist Max Weber's Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, in which he theorizes that demonstrations of success in one's work life serve as a way for believers, (Calvinist Puritans in Weber's case study, but he posits that this came to be true for, generally speaking, all Protestants), to ensure that they were among the elect, those chosen by God for salvation, rather than those created solely for the purpose of suffering eternal damnation. Many of the supposedly elect, those who had internalized this belief, were perhaps aware that their own lives, although successful by all reasonable standards, were dominated by craven motives that didn't mix too well with the notion of electedness. As a result, along with the work ethic that contributed to the creation of the greatest capitalist economy in history (until recently), there developed a sense that something was not right about the way that society was constructed around this mode of

production. This dis-ease with the world as it is contributes to the need for escaping from the effects of its exigencies through the use of substances and addictive processes, the compulsion to repeat, or Wiederholungszwang, as it is known in psychoanalysis, the ultimate goal being to reach that state of consciousness that Freud referred to as 'aesthetic indifference.' (Freud, 1961, 7)

Alcoholism is a relational disorder, as defined by Alcoholics Anonymous. Kurtz, (2002 ) states that "...the closest the book Alcoholics Anonymous comes to a definition of alcoholism appears on p.44, at the conclusion of the first paragraph of the "We Agnostics" chapter, where we are told that alcoholism "is an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer." These people who founded AA are "idealists;" (Kurtz, 2002) they believed in turning their own lives - and the world these lives were engaged in-into something better than what the conventional wisdom held was possible. The lasting contribution of Alcoholics Anonymous, in terms of its effect on American culture, is the articulation of the concept of alcoholism as a disease that is threefold in nature, a disease that is comprised of a physical, mental, and spiritual dimension. The treatment of such a disease requires medical measures at times, to treat

both the physical and mental dimensions. But the primary approach utilized by Alcoholics Anonymous is the Twelve step recovery model, which involves the examination of one's beliefs, thoughts, and actions, and the communication of certain ethical principles in what can be regarded as a particular form of discourse, one designed to counter a previously dominant discourse and set it aside so that a new way of living can be embarked upon.

The Twelve-step recovery model is a discourse, then, of the type defined by Lincoln, utilizing Gramsci; that of a treatise used to respond to, challenge, "...demystify, delegitimize, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role [in the domination of the] subordinat[ed]." (Lincoln, 5) It also allows for those who are dominated to see their own participation in this domination, and thus provides them with the capacity to respond to this domination with a counter-hegemonic dialogue which can liberate from oppression. As Lincoln points out, referencing Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology*, the "dominant discourse of any era...is the discourse of the dominant class." (Lincoln, 49) The widespread incidence of addictions and codependence in contemporary capitalist culture is evidence of the claim



that this present discourse of dominance is failing, is being perceived as inconsistent with and unviable for meaningful existence. This dissatisfaction grows, and people are turning to substances and processes to drown out the consciousness of their disquiet with the dominant discourse. But some discourse is necessary for society to function properly. The Twelve-step recovery model makes a new discourse possible, one that is focused not on domination of others, but on mutuality with, love for, and service to one's fellow human beings. The proliferation of Twelve-step programs and the spread of the Twelve-step philosophy of love and service is evidence of the basic structural shifts on a societal level that are possible as a result of the alterations in the discourse from one of dominance to one of inter-connectedness. (Author's note: It should be pretty clear by now that this is not a work of scholarly detachment.)

Impetus for such a structural shift arises out of the experience of what society terms aberrance. The active alcoholic is operating on the margins of "normal" society as the disease of alcoholism progresses. What is not apparent to "normal" society, and yet what are explicitly the reasons for this aberrant, abnormal behavior, are

precisely the causes and conditions of the disease of alcoholism that the Twelve-step inventories seek to uncover. Societal perception of aberration tends to overlook or even be complicit in the covering-up of the existence of these factors, factors inherent in the societal construction which such aberrant behavior is responding to. In this situation the alcoholic enters into a state of anti-nomianism, unable to live by the old rules and beliefs that once sustained him, yet unable to adopt a new way of living. This condition is, on some level, a semi-conscious act of self -destruction which leads, if it can be survived, to a bottoming-out process that enables the alcoholic to fully shed both the old ways of thinking and the anti-nomial state and adopt new rules and beliefs that are conducive to a new way of living. This is the recovery process in essence.

Complicating the transformative potential of the Twelve-step Recovery Model is the adeptness of the American capitalist culture in continuously reinverting hegemony. Lincoln provides evidence of this ability in his discussion of the dialectic nature of symbolic inversion. (142-159) In examples drawn from modern art (Duchamp's Fountain); Roman historian Livy's account of Menenius Agrippa and the

plebeian succession; and the dialectic manipulations and preservation of the status quo endemic to "All-Star Wrestling," Lincoln demonstrates the ability of the dominant culture to co-opt forms of inversion and use them to actually strengthen their position. This capacity to 'turn the tables' represents a powerful countering force to the transformative potential of the Twelve-step Recovery Model. This counter-inversion is evident in AA speaker meetings and at the group level in the conservative nature of testimonials and the professed attitudes and opinions regarding avoidance of 'outside' issues of religion and politics. (Examples)

Another transformative element of the Twelve-step Recovery Model is the way it enables people to re-think their conception of God. In doing so they are empowered to go beyond (when they themselves deem necessary) their original conceptions, conceptions perhaps influenced by parents and religious authority figures, to a new and more authentic understanding of the God-concept. They are able to reclaim, or maybe claim for the first time, their agency in this important relationship. This process makes possible the balancing-out of the moral equation, in which moral responsibility is equal to the level of autonomy one has in

making rational choices. If a person never had the chance to create an authentic moral structure, how just is it to hold them responsible for their actions. As Talbot argues in his 2005 dissertation, *Moral Reasons and Personal History: A Rational Competence Account of Moral Responsibility*, (2005) moral responsibility should still hold for even those who are "constitutionally unreceptive" to moral reasons. (vi) This is true, certainly, but if the individual is to be held responsible, and the goal is to create a just society, rather than a purely punitive one, should not the influences of the formative community such an individual emerges from be held accountable as well? Systems are designed by those in power to exonerate themselves and 'blame the victim,' the individual who has been influenced by societal constructs. Quite often the individual does assume responsibility for their actions, but it is rarer for the party of equal or greater influence, i.e., the social organization, to do so on a level that justice would require. This ability of the larger group to remain free of such responsibility is made possible by the use of myth.

Lincoln equates the development of Greek ideals that formed the foundation of Western civilization with the

ideal myth of capitalism. (210) This movement from 'mythos' to 'logos,' according to this narrative, is what made progress possible. As Lincoln so helpfully points out, myths are quite often created and maintained, not by the people who the narrative is about, but by those whose aim it is to construct a controlling narrative for the subjects of such a story. (211) Thus myth takes on the function of discourse. Discourse has been used throughout history to establish and legitimize authority. As Lincoln holds, referring to poetry as a specific form of discourse, but arguably as is applicable to other forms, discourse is "a means to define, defend, reflect upon, romanticize, analyze, legitimate, exaggerate, mystify, modify, and advance its own position, not to mention that of its practitioners." (21)

In contrast, the discourse that is embodied in the twelve-step model is a means for the participant to deconstruct his current position and reconstruct a new position, one that makes greater sense in light of the new information available as a result of the ethical self-assessment that the steps avail. Recounting one's own truth, constructing one's own story, one's own myth, is transformative.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Recovering from "Americanism": An Explication of The Twelve Step Recovery Model as an Ethic of Liberation, Utilizing H. Richard Niebuhr's Ethic of Response**

The particular, culturally and historic ethic of liberation that I explore here arose out of the context of white middle class America in the 1930s in response to the disease of alcoholism. This ethic of liberation is otherwise known as the Twelve Step recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Twelve step groups have since become part of the American landscape in modes of recovery involving not only alcoholism but other forms of addiction and obsessive/compulsive behavior ranging from gambling, sex, eating habits and debting, to name a fraction. Gamblers Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, and Debtors Anonymous are just a few of the therapeutic groups that have their basis in the Twelve Step Recovery Model. These groups, like the base communities of Latin American liberation theology, are comprised of people who find themselves in situations of domination resulting from both internal and external causes. Group members thus become especially sensitive to the necessity for taking action, in order to change this dominant status quo. Twelve

step groups are also especially adept, like their counterparts in the base communities, at identifying forces aligned against such change. These two seemingly unconnected entities, Latin American liberation theologians and Twelve Step practitioners, share this sensitivity to the need for change, and each in turn have somewhat distinctive, yet also similar, approaches to assessing this need and acting upon it.

To make this connection between these two seemingly disparate movements clearer I am turning now to an examination of American scholar H. Richard Niebuhr's articulation of an ethic of response from his book *The Responsible Self*. Within these pages Niebuhr introduces his ethic of response in the context of a typology of ethics, which he explains is centered on the idea that humans try to figure their way through life based on those events in their lives which give evidence that their existence is meaningful.

Thus the Twelve Step model functions as a pragmatic ethic of liberation as well as an ethic of response. It functions in this dual manner through a process of gradual spiritual awakening similar to the 'conscientization' process as enumerated by Brazilian educator Paulo Freiere

and implemented by Latin American liberation theologians in their work with the poor. The principle behind conscientization is engagement in a process that leads to ridding oneself or a group of the overarching and unwarranted authority claimed by the prevailing consciousness. What gives the twelve step model its power in this context is its pragmatic approach, which focuses on causes and conditions and getting rid of old ideas based on false information. Through the twelve steps, which include the process of ethical self-examination known alternatively as the fourth step or moral inventory, existing societal constructs based on false or unquestioned ideologies can be interrogated and their pseudo-ontological basis, which is at least a contributing factor in existing inequalities of resource distribution, can be challenged.

So then, the freedom that comes from examining one's own resentments, fears, and pre-suppositions about life and how societies and units within should be constructed, can provide the impetus for transformation on both the personal and collective levels of inter-relationship. The twelve step approach is so freeing because, like Freire's approach to conscientization, it starts by challenging the individual's own strongly held beliefs and allows the



examination of these beliefs without the extenuating circumstance of the need to follow the directives of an external authority. The authority relied upon is recognized as an inner resource which one gains access to through the process of the Twelve Steps. Through accessing this authority, or 'higher power' within oneself, one is able to get past layers of socialization based on principles of dominance and get to an altruistic core that gives one a new approach to matters of existence, both personal and communal. Just as liberation theologians, such as the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez, the Salvadorean priest Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff of Brazil, and Jon Segundo of Uruguay, in reaction to the poverty and social injustice burdening the people they sought to serve, focus on conversion of societal structures by applying a preferential "option for the poor" based in part on the Gospel of Mathew, 25:40('Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. '), practitioners of the twelve steps can apply their model to transforming both individual and societal structures through the implementation of the preferential option for the newly recovering individual, and indeed to the principles of love and service in all

contexts. What makes the Twelve Step model so promising as an ethic of liberation is that this process of ethical self-examination can be entered into at any level of engagement in order to overcome this systemic domination and achieve liberation. This liberation ethic is effective for both the dominator and the dominated, and indeed helps to clarify lines dividing the two.

**Self-consciousness vs. Self-Centeredness: The Inventory Process as a Means to Historical Self-awareness**

Taking an inventory as outlined in the Twelve Step Recovery Model allows the practitioner to critically assess their thoughts, beliefs, and actions and prevents them from falling into that category of one who engages in positivism or scientific rationalism, "...repress[ing]...its own enabling historical conditions." (Eagleton, 91) In essence, the inventory process directly acknowledges and in fact interrogates the historical conditions that have been the basis for one's belief system to that point. How does this work? By engaging in a historical narrative, by going back through one's life, the inventory uncovers resentment, fear, and the underlying sources of guilt and shame. This

process in turn makes possible the examination of patterns of thinking and behaving, and most crucially, allows the practitioner to take responsibility for participating in those patterns. Thus they are transformed from a victim of circumstance to a fully empowered agent in their own lives. The Big Book illustrates the inventory process quite simply with this chart, found on page 65 of Chapter Five, entitled "How It Works": "On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with?"(65) Following this question is an instructional chart, the text of which shows how to make a three-column list of 1)those with whom one is angry, 2) the causes for the anger, and 3)what this resentment affects in terms of personal or sex relations, pocketbook, ambition, security, self-esteem, and fear.

Then, following the instructional chart, the text gives further instructions on the next, very crucial element of the 4<sup>th</sup> Step, an element that is arguably what makes this inventory tool so powerful. It has the practitioner look at the role he himself played in these resentments, in what is known as the 4<sup>th</sup> Column:

We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it (the inventory) carefully. The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. [In other words, the first three columns.] The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. [Remaining resentful, and thus in a state of bondage to self.] Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only *seemed* to win. Our moments of triumph were short lived.

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worthwhile. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die. (Anonymous, 65-66)

It is interesting to note here that many alcoholics have shared that this insanity of drink can be both a curse and a blessing, as it was only the threat of such a drastic outcome, death itself looming on the horizon, which impelled them to seek help. Unfortunately for many alcoholics, even this threat of death is not enough to overcome the compulsion to drink, and they continue on the path to self-destruction.

Returning to the text, we see a solution to this dilemma emerging:

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison...We turned back to the list, *for it held the key* [emphasis mine] to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

This was our course. We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. [This realization of the connectedness and interrelational aspect of human dynamics is arguably a key factor in the proliferation of the application of the TSRM to many other addictive substances and processes.] We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves: 'This is a sick [person]. How can I be helpful to him [or her]? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.' (67)

This last is known by many in Twelve Step programs as the 4<sup>th</sup> Step Prayer, or Resentment prayer. Those who use this prayer testify to its effectiveness in those who use it of resentment. Many found that they were able to stop doing harmful things to themselves because they no longer needed to repress these resentments. Human beings are prone

to resentment because we are sentient creatures. We feel sensations and emotions, and these in turn stimulate our thoughts. Thinking involves memory, and these memories arise, stimulated by sensation, in the painful form of resentment. The metaphor of the sunshine of the spirit, which resentment cuts off access to, is quite apt for describing what the resentful human is experiencing: darkness on a spiritual level. In the case of the alcoholic, and more generally for any addict, when this flow of light, resentment-free love for oneself and one's world gets stopped up, clogged up by obsessive re-sensing of past wrongs experienced, life indeed can become very dark, and the only way out of this darkness for such people is to resort to the illusory sense of lightness brought on for a moment by the use of some substance or engagement in some addictive process.

This returns us to the solution as offered in the 4<sup>th</sup> Step inventory. After all resentments are listed, and all causes and effects are examined (Columns 1-3), then this crucial task of recognizing and stating one's own participation in the resentment must be carried out if the sufferer is to have any chance at freedom from such sickening hard feelings. Somewhat separate but related sub-

categories of inventory are also conducted, looking specifically at a) fears, and b) one's past relationships, including sexual activities, to see where wrongs can be set right (Steps 8 and 9) and "in order to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life." (69)

The inventory process is thus a method for historically interrogating one's life at a level below the surface, a way to delve deeper into the factors involved, unpacking the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of one's history to expose underlying operating principles which have led the sufferer into the lonely prison that is the isolated existence of the alcoholic/addict. The power of the inventory is in revealing who the jailer truly is and in providing the key to freedom.

Yet does this inventory process go far enough? Certainly it has been demonstrated that the ultimate problem, and the ultimate solution reside in the individual's realization of their complicity in their bondage to self, but does this automatically absolve other individuals or institutions of any responsibility in the domination of others? Knowing the truth for oneself is absolutely imperative, but are there no conditions under which a person or a group might truly see themselves as

blameless, and others at fault? There may be no simple answer to this question, but neither does this preclude using the inventory process for situations that rise above and beyond issues of individual responsibility.

All of the preceding might lead one to ask this question: Are Americans in particular in need of a recovery program- one that specifically seeks to liberate them from the pernicious results of membership in the dominant culture? I argue that just as some have found a solution to their addictions to alcohol and drugs, so can Americans individually and collectively benefit from a twelve step program designed to liberate them from the bondage of being American as it is defined in contemporary context. What does it mean to be an American in these terms? It entails conforming to certain standards and ways of being that are defined as acceptable by the prevailing forces within the American culture. Significantly, being American is connected with conforming to the parameters of white culture. I use this term in the sense that educator Shelly Tochluk does in her book *Witnessing Whiteness: First Steps toward an Anti-Racist Practice and Culture*. Being this sort of American means:



...segregated social lives, [atomization], disconnection, [belief in 'rugged] individualism,' sanitization [of one's cultural history], arrogance, obliviousness, a sense of entitlement, unrecognized privileges, avoidance of social concerns faced by disproportionate numbers of people of color, the sense of self as normal, innocent, and unaffected by race, and the acceptance of Western ideals as universal and the only valid way of seeing the world. (Tochluk 2008)

This description is not meant to be inclusive of all Americans, of course. It is intended to be a helpful heuristic device to arrive at a discussion of how these characteristics that do affect so many lives, both within American culture and elsewhere in the world, can be addressed. My reasons for making this argument are twofold. First of all, this argument is grounded in the notion that within the realm of societal construction there is always room, and need, for improvement. There is also always resistance to change. The resistance to altering the structure, particularly the economic structure, of American society has to do with deeply entrenched beliefs in the superiority of this structure. In order for change to take place, these deeply entrenched beliefs must be challenged. In order for this challenge to be truly effective and transformative, there needs to be a mechanism in place which can uncover the origins and sources for those

beliefs, as well as challenge the systems of maintenance which allow these beliefs to continue to hold so much sway over American culture.

Secondly, the current social structure is geared towards benefitting the wealthy and the powerful. The poor and the middle classes are used to provide both the resources to make the structure work, in terms of wage-labor and consumption, and, particularly in the case of the middle classes, the ideological support which legitimates this structure of dominance. The result of this dominance is inequality, although this inequality and the system of dominance that causes it are obscured by ideologies of freedom and rugged individualism. This inequality is proving to be harmful to the cause of human well-being and can be ameliorated through a program of societal restructuring; the creation of new communities of mutuality and interdependence.

The need for improvement is self-evident, at least to those who are either on the underside of the structure, experiencing the harmful effects of domination, and/or to those who for a variety of reasons have become aware of the injustice inherent within the structure. Nevertheless, one can look for corroboration of the reality of increasing

inequality and its deleterious effects on human culture in such sources as the Development Index, published by the United Nations Development Programme.(Patel 2009) It is also clear, using the same criteria, that the current socio-economic structure benefits the wealthy and the powerful. Social structures and supporting mechanisms have been put into place, historically speaking, which are intended to offer an advantage to those who create the structures and implement the mechanisms. Rules are created to keep these advantages from being eroded, and these rules are backed by the force of law and its coercive agents, which include but are not limited to the police and the military. Thus institutionalized advantages are quite often unconsciously generated, emanating from a context of social relationships. These social relationships, including family, religious affiliation, legal, economic, and class guidelines, both serve to comprise and maintain the social structure in a condition of status quo. Scholars and social critics such as Marx, Weber, Spencer, and Durkheim have all weighed in on the nature of the social structure. Although they express somewhat disparate concepts of how social structures develop, the overall consensus seems to be that such structures develop out of a combination of natural

processes determined by necessity and intentional social constructs in a dialectical manner. Underlying these intentional constructs are the biases of those who are involved in the creation of these structures. (Porpora 1989) These biases influence the social construction, as well as those who participate in the construction, either through active ideological participation in construction or passive acceptance of the rules that legitimate the structure.

The twelve step recovery model, developing out of the white, middle-class milieu of Depression-era alcoholic suffering, and initially embodied in the program of recovery known popularly as Alcoholics Anonymous, is designed to liberate the sufferer from the "bondage of self."(Anonymous 1976) This liberation from the bondage of self allows the sufferer to "claim the right to be a person, not an inanimate object, in society."(Berryman 1986) The ethical self-examination implemented in the inventory steps of the model is the key to conscientization, the afore-mentioned concept developed by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire that utilizes literacy education to examine and analyse social and politically contradictory structures. Practicing the Twelve Steps

allows for a probing and unpacking of the contradictions inherent in individual as well as communal belief systems which serve to legitimate unjust social structures. This process takes place within a hermeneutical circle that can serve to deconstruct those contradictory structures. The process can start with the structure as a whole, and then move to the components of the structure, or it can begin with the components and move to interpretation of the entirety. In the case of the ethical self-examination made possible by the inventory steps, this process involves interrogating those components of the ideology in question which comprise the structure of dominance. These components can include intentions, motives, and agendas designed to favor one group over others. As these components are interrogated, new perspectives for understanding both how these structures serve to maintain the dominant status quo as well how this situation can be transformed into something more compassionate and equitable can be established.

Having examined liberation theology and the TSRM as both being approaches which lend themselves to Niebuhr's typology, we can now move on to a direct examination of his approach. In order to demonstrate how the twelve step model

of recovery is simultaneously an ethic of liberation as well as an ethic of response I will first provide a more detailed description of this system, which offers a strong outline of the major categorical approaches to ethics, the teleological and deontological, while also specifically delineating his concept of responsibility ethics. Niebuhr conceived of response ethics as "the effort of [a]...community to [critically examine] its moral action by means of reflection." (*ibid.* 8) He saw that this reflection took place in primarily three methods, the deontological, the teleological, and the contextual or response approach. These approaches sought to answer, in respective order, the questions "what is the right thing to do?, what is the good thing to do?, and what is the best thing to do in the current situation?" (*ibid.*7)

Ethics is a guide toward right action. Niebuhr does not wish to prescribe what one should do, but rather show how to go about figuring out the objective good within subjective circumstances.(16) This stance comes from his belief that ethics were meant to be used to elicit a response to matters as they unfolded rather than as a rigid template of compulsory behavior.<sup>10</sup> Niebuhr based this ethic on the theological belief that "[r]esponsibility

affirms [that] God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to his action.”(126) This explanation of the typology of ethics and the ethics of response touches at the roots of liberation ethics in pointing out the synecdoches, symbols or figures of speech, that are used to interpret the ethical structure by critical participants (*homo dialogicus*) in the ongoing maintenance and growth of a society in and toward liberative ideals.(160)

The notion of *hamartia*, “missing the mark,” is a useful figure of speech when seeking to explicate the ethics of response and liberation. Niebuhr is seeking to convey with this type of ethic the sense in which humans may not always ‘hit the mark,’ or be successful in responding ethically to a given situation, but that they have in this ethic a way of living which allows them to make the adjustment needed to get themselves back on the path, to use another figure of speech. This ethic of response thus gives one a ‘goal’ to shoot for.

Niebuhr’s contribution in offering this outline of the response ethic to the context of liberation manifests in the way that this particular type of ethic helps to clarify

what being an ethical practitioner can mean in the contemporary context. Some may protest that he is articulating a whole new way of being ethical, one which neglects the traditional methods, but Niebuhr's responsibility ethic model actually serves to enhance the ability of the scholar to understand other approaches to ethics.

Working from a backdrop marked by European theologians such as Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Elert, who insisted on grounding all ethical analysis in the Bible, Niebuhr came to believe that their methods did not allow the ethicist to effectively respond to "the complexities of human nature"(20)presented by the situation of modernity. This is not to say that Niebuhr himself didn't look to the Bible as an essential source of guidance for ethical action. He merely surmised that there were other sources for ethical authority as well, both within and outside the Western ethical environment. The two forms of ethics that have arguably played the largest roles in Western culture thus far are the deontological and the teleological. These two approaches have often operated in tension with each other. Niebuhr was aware of this tension, particularly as it manifested itself in the issue of racial desegregation in



American culture. The deontological obligation to obey the Jim Crow laws was juxtaposed against the morally good pursuit of equal rights embodied in the Civil Rights movement.(55) Therefore Niebuhr proposed another ethic, another representative symbol, one that would respond to contextual reality in what he felt was a more effective manner than the others:

In this situation the rise of the new symbolism of responsibility is important...What is implicit in the idea of responsibility is the image of man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him. As in the case of maker and of citizen, man-the-answerer offers us a synechdochic analogy.(56)

This synechdochic analogy, explains Niebuhr, is humanity's attempt to understand the comprehensiveness of being by examining one component of that being; a heuristic device, in essence. Niebuhr saw this approach as especially effective and necessary in the context of suffering. In this approach, the response ethic, it is this fitting response, answering the question "What is the best thing to do in these given circumstances?" that is the guiding metaphor. Niebuhr asserts that it is this next indicated step, "the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of further response, [which]

is alone conducive to the good and alone is right." (*ibid.*) In this way, the response ethic can be seen as an ethic of liberation, as the implementation of the ethic empowers one to exercise agency freely.

There are four components of the response ethic. They are, in order, response, interpretation, accountability, and social solidarity. The first element, response, entails a reply to interpreted actions. The second element is interpretation. The response is a response to one's interpretation of what is taking place. The third element, accountability, involves the agent not only interpreting the action upon him, but also thinking about the consequences of his response to the action upon him. This third element, accountability, leads to the fourth element, social solidarity. This final element involves what Niebuhr calls "a continuing community of agents." (63-65) As I will demonstrate, these elements of the response ethic are also embodied in the Twelve Steps and the communities, first and foremost Alcoholics Anonymous, which pattern themselves on them.

The question of morality throughout the Bible, according to Niebuhr, was not "What is the goal (good)?" or "What is the law (right)?" but "What is happening?" and

"What is the fitting response to what is happening?"(66) Niebuhr's approach, as well as the approach of the twelve step model, is neither primarily teleological nor deontological, but considers this question most important in determining ethical behavior/response: To whom or what am I responsible and in what community of interaction am I myself?(67) Nature, reality, is interpreted by the agent in relation to what others have conveyed to the agent, either directly through language or indirectly through observation, about what is going on.(81) Niebuhr explains that "the responsible self appears...as one who responds to nature and then is reacted to by other selves also responding to the natural event..."(83) But there is a second type of interaction, which utilizes "speculative or observing reason."(*ibid.*) This distinction is not to be construed as dualistic, like the mind/body distinction. "Equally serious has been the consequences that the [supposed] separation [of the responsible self into these two interactions] has often led us to ignore the practical or ethical elements in our knowing as well as the observing, interpreting elements in our doing."(*ibid.*) Response ethics are concerned with universal accountability, the idea that the overall responsibility

takes place over time and in space, with the awareness that our response affects others and their response affects us. This parallels the situation of the liberative ethics of the twelve step model, in which the practitioner realizes this interrelational dynamic between responsive agents.

Faith as trust is a key theme of the twelve step liberation ethic: how humans deal with the fact of existence, trusting that reality will remain rational. This is different from faith in a particular truth claim or religious narrative. This faith as trust is the response that is made to the knowledge that there is a power in existence that is either on our side or not. As the second step of the twelve step program of recovery, in its original form, Alcoholics Anonymous, states, humans come "to believe that a power greater than themselves" (AA, 58) is operating in their lives. That power is either everything or it is nothing. Niebuhr states the same sentiment thusly: "The inscrutable power by which we are is either for us or against us." (Niebuhr 119) Both Niebuhr's response ethic and the twelve step liberation ethic reconfigure the relationship of human beings to that power which they access through the practice of these ethical approaches. The higher power becomes the source of all

actions upon humanity, and humans either do or do not trust in the ultimate beneficence of these actions.

The twelve step approach is then, both a liberation ethic and a response ethic. Its outlined plan of action, where one first admits they have a problem, *responding* to the actions upon him, then comes to believe, through *interpretation* of the initial response, in a power that can act upon the individual for good, and subsequently embarks upon a plan of action involving steps of inventory and making amends to those harmed in the past by his actions, leading to *accountability*, culminating in an ongoing response/action process that involves him in social solidarity (service to his group and to other suffering alcoholics), fits into the contextual response paradigm as outlined by Niebuhr. The Serenity Prayer, recited together by members of the fellowship at the beginning (and often at the end as well) of meetings can be seen as a synecdoche of the entire response ethic that is the Twelve Steps: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." The prayer calls for acceptance of the actions taken upon one, and the courage

to take action in response, and the wisdom to interpret which response to make.

As for the steps themselves, step one is the admission of powerlessness, of limited ability, to manage one's own existence within the context of one's life as it is presently being lived (i.e., the state of being dominated either by active addiction or structural injustice). Step two, coming to believe that a power that is simultaneously greater than oneself, yet absolutely intrinsic to oneself ultimately, can bring one into integration, wholeness, and freedom from the bondage of self involves the faith/ trust mechanism that allows one to engage in the metanoic reinterpretation of the higher power, no longer as enemy, bringer of death, but rather as the "unsuspected inner resource", (*Anonymous*,570). Step three involves making a decision to turn one's will and life over to the care and continuing guidance of this intrinsic power, in effect, "responding to God's actions" upon us in a contextual manner. Then in step four, in which one engages in ethical self-examination and moral inventory, one is responding by listing resentments, fears, and past harmful behaviors, in order to "shape a sane and sound ideal for a future life."(*ibid.* 69) This step, and the response ethic as well,

contain a teleological component, but this ideal itself is to be used as a *goal* in eliciting a *response* to the given *context* one finds oneself in.

Step five is a continuation of step four, and calls for engaging with another human being and one's higher power in the triadic reciprocal response and action necessary to continue responding to life. There is a realization in this step that one's actions both influence others and are influenced by others. This reinforces the sense of connectedness. Step six, in which one becomes entirely ready to have the higher power remove all their defects of character, is contextual and liberative as well, involving an ongoing process of examining these defects of character and how they have been formed by responses in the past to actions upon oneself. Step seven, then, involves humbly - i.e. responding contextually to the realization of one's own part in a dysfunctional pattern of living- asking the higher power to act upon the agent by removing these shortcomings and no-longer-useful responses to the world. In step eight the agent responds to the new context of awareness of those harmed by his actions by listing them and taking the action to become willing to set right these situations. Then in step nine amends are made as warranted,

responding to the context of what is fitting for all persons involved, being aware (interpreting) of whether further action is helpful or harmful. This step revolves around the response ethic component of accountability, as does the tenth step, in which the agent continues to engage in critical self-examination on a regular basis and when finding one's actions to be wrong, punctually responds by admitting this wrong and seeking to set it right.

In step eleven the agent seeks "through prayer and meditation to improve" - i.e., to continue to respond to- [one's] "conscious contact with [the inherent resource, the higher power]," (59) in order to continue to act in response to its actions upon one. This step is not concerned so much with a goal or pre-set rule, but solely with the intention to respond as this power would have them respond. The responder seeks to align his will with that of the higher power. Step twelve entails a continuing response in the context of a gradual -(usually-there are examples of sudden changes) - spiritual awakening, as the agent continues to act by carrying the message of hope for the overcoming of spiritual death to others who have not yet had this awakening response. The agent also continues to



responsively put into practice the ethics of the twelve step model in the ongoing context of life.

The foundational principles and program of action of the twelve step model were clearly meant to be contextual, as the founders concluded that "we know only a little; more will be revealed." (164) This ethic of the twelve step model is quite consistent with the synecdochic model propounded by Niebuhr. One attempts to act in accordance with the bidding of that unsuspected inner resource, although not always succeeding. The synecdoche of hamartia, straying from the mark, is applicable, and is recognized as well in the twelve step model, as the writers note that "we are not saints; the point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." (60) What the twelve step liberation ethic strives for, and what Niebuhr explicates for his readers to take in and respond to, is this continuing ability to proceed in a responsive manner in the task of liberative transformation. Can this ethic be applied to the state of increasing uncertainty people find themselves in as the second decade of the 21st century unfolds?

## Chapter 4

Achieving Access to a Power Greater Than Oneself Through the Use of the Twelve-steps as a Dialectic Response to Traditional Religion

Incarcerated for the fourth time at Manhattan's Towns Hospital in 1934, Wilson had a spiritual awakening – a flash of white light, a liberating awareness of God – that led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous and Wilson's revolutionary 12-step program, the successful remedy for alcoholism. The 12 steps have also generated successful programs for [recovery from] eating disorders, gambling, narcotics, debting, sex addiction and people affected by others' addictions. Aldous Huxley called him "the greatest social architect of our century." (Cheever, 1999)

As human beings continue to confront this increasing uncertainty in their lives, many as we have seen already have turned to other solutions to their existential problems, solutions that are more or less satisfactory depending upon the details. With this seeking of alternative solutions comes the opportunity to engage in practices that are more harmful than helpful, and so people continue to struggle with addiction and alcoholism. Thus, the continuing necessity for a solution. Some pursue a medical solution, still others a traditional religious solution in their communities of choice, but many are forced into incarceration as a result of their addictive behavior, and of those many, quite a few become alienated

from the mainstream avenues of spiritual redemption provided by traditional approaches to religious experience. For many of these, there is another avenue to spiritual experience, one provided by the Twelve Step Recovery Model, which promises a spiritual experience as the result of working the Twelve Steps. This journey of recovery, this search for access to a higher power, which culminates in freedom from compulsion, obsession, and addiction, is then, quite arguably a spiritual experience. Yet, this is not always an easy avenue to follow. First of all, what exactly does it mean to have a spiritual experience? Historically, at least in the West, these experiences were typically the concern of religious institutions. Those institutions, in turn, guarded access to such experiences jealously, lest knowledge of the way to enlightenment might fall into the hands of ordinary people who might then turn away from these institutions as they realized they no longer needed them to supply the access to enlightenment. From this hermeneutical standpoint I will seek to consider the opening of access to a spiritual experience of a higher power; access that has resulted from the application of the twelve step recovery model. Application of this model has

done much to challenge the old system of beliefs regarding what it means to have a spiritual experience.

This chapter is written with the intention to demonstrate how access to the divine has been 'closed' historically, mystified as it were, by those who sought to control such access out of fear of losing their own constructed authority over the spiritual life of fellow human beings. The history of spirituality can be understood as a dialectic between those who have wielded power in hierarchic, patriarchal systems, and those men and women who have followed different paths. I believe this argument will resonate especially for those who find themselves alienated by the traditional Western discourse on spirituality, as it has to do primarily with the deconstruction of the dominant story of how spiritual experiences take place in the Christian tradition. This dominant tradition has created an entire system of orthodox spirituality which in effect discounts others' agency in fully experiencing the holy in their lives.

A premise of this argument is that up until recently, for the most part, the definition of spiritual experience and therefore, access to such experiences, in the Western religious traditions in particular, has excluded too many

individuals, due to their unwillingness to accept doctrinal and dogmatic requirements-requirements designed by institutions to extend their tradition. This renders these traditions functionally unsatisfactory as a path to enlightenment for an increasing number of people. However, as a result of a natural dialectic process of unfolding and elaboration of the inner nature of social construct, i.e., as institutional religion proceeds to its fullest development as a power-wielding institution, the possibility arises that, out of necessity, these same traditional institutions could transform into an arrangement that is arguably post-traditional, and there would then be opportunity for the advent of a new form of spiritual experience to respond to this transformation. This is the point at which I see the practice, and not just theory, of twelve-step recovery programs coming into play. Through this unique process of ethical self-examination and the resultant cessation of old modes of operating within a society that this recovery model embodies, oppressed and marginalized persons of all faiths have been given the tools to rid themselves of constructs that cause them to remain imprisoned in an existence they have participated in creating.

Twelve step recovery is itself a path of negation, but not of what the sacred is **not**; it is rather, a path that critiques intellectual, spiritual, ethnic, and societal outlooks and configurations that take part in and enable wide-reaching exploitation of alcoholics, addicts, and other marginalized persons. The task of those who would choose this path to spiritual enlightenment is to confront traditional religion with its own hidden biases regarding gender, race, class, and social injustice, in order to contribute to a more fulfilling religious experience.

Although never coming near suggesting a concrete model for a Twelve step approach to spiritual studies, the sociologist Robert Wuthnow offers some corroboration of the recovery perspective on spirituality in *Experimentation in American Religion*. He contrasts his analysis with that of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, who saw mysticism as "...associated more with political withdrawal than with political activity." (Wuthnow, 1978, 79) This latter attitude seems to be the pre-dominant one, as evidenced by agreement not only from Weber and Troeltsch, but other scholars of religion such as Underhill, Harkness, Otto, and James. (Wuthnow, 1978, 81, fn.8) Wuthnow's contrary argument is that these post-traditional spiritual

practitioners see salvation as a process, rather than a choice. (Wuthnow, 1978, 82) They believe that all persons have the capacity for an everlasting relationship with the divine through nourishment of the 'Divine Soul' within them. (Ibid.) As a result of this realization of immanence, the mystic is compelled to seek justice and to overcome inequality. (Wuthnow, 1978, 83) The spiritual seeker operates as a social critic, answering to a Higher Authority rather than worldly authorities. (Ibid.) This approach is quite comparable to the avenue of response and resistance to oppression sought and followed by those who engage in recovery via the twelve steps.

The focus of recovery-based spirituality is on a Higher Power whose primary characteristic is love. This love manifests itself as a hidden internal source. People in recovery are specially poised to understand the suffering of others, per this analysis, because of the quality of their own suffering, and thus are able to respond to others' suffering with empathy and insight. Contemplation, long an aspect of spirituality, is especially useful in calling up this reservoir of insight and empathy. Traditional religious institutions, in their concern for continuity, will sometimes, albeit perhaps

inadvertently, seek to restrain those who want to go deeper in their connection with the divine. Contemplation allows for this radical descent into the depths of self which makes accessing the divine possible. (Wuthnow, 1978, 194) Contemplation is a key element as well of the recovery model spiritual experience, as the eleventh step is focused on prayer and meditation as the penultimate stage in the recovery process.

The question then arises as to whether there is an authentic, essential form of spirituality. Is the Jamesian model, explicitly individualistic and private, the only one available, or is it possible to have a mystical experience which is effable and can be shared with others? Can this shared experience occur even if it calls for the spiritual experience to rise up out of the sleepy status quo of traditional beliefs, challenge the dominant class and initiate real transformative action? Is there anything wrong, on the other hand, with reserving spiritual experience for the private realm, especially if by doing so one can find peace within unresolved issues? Not necessarily, I would argue, but this then brings up the question as to whether a sacred union with the Divine is still valid if so many others are unable to share in that



same connection because of what at the root are political factors? Can it be asserted that no one singular claim for spiritual experience holds, but that there must be infinite varieties, as James suggests? This is the argument that this present chapter is indeed making; that there are as many possible spiritual experiences as there are beings to experience them.

But if then there is no single essential spiritual experience, can there be an essential endpoint of this myriad of experiences, or is that with which union is sought relative as well? Richard Rorty states that the collective process which involves such mystical union is a tendency toward "greater human solidarity," (Rorty, 1989, 192) but not one that involves "recognition of...the human essence." (Ibid.) What he envisions is the recognition of similarities which then would make room for more inclusiveness in the 'us' or the 'we' that are seeking spiritual union.

Twelve-step recovery programs are based on the original text, Alcoholics Anonymous, published in 1939 and named after the fledgling fellowship of recovering alcoholics. These programs, one can argue, have aided in the deconstruction of the spiritual experience by

democratizing the process. This opening of access to spiritual experience results from the fact that there is no requirement for the kind of divine source one unites with, as long as it is a power greater than oneself. The co-founders of the original twelve step recovery program, Alcoholics Anonymous, came to the prescient conclusion that in order for their course of action to be effective in the recovery of alcoholics this course of action must have a spiritual basis. Taking much of their inspiration from the writings of Carl Jung and William James, especially the latter's *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, as well as first century Christian principles as propounded by AA's predecessor, the Oxford Group, they were able to plot a course which became the basis for a practical text for millions of human beings who have used this text to find relief from a myriad of addictions and compulsive behavior through a connection with a power greater than themselves. Most importantly, a key element of this process is that this higher power must be of one's own understanding, rather than the product of a traditional mimetic process, which Rene Girard (Girard, 1991, 36) has shown to be restrictive. These people find themselves able to access this power through a systematic process which in its

essence is the path of the mystic as described by Margaret Smith in *Introduction to Mysticism*. In Smith's introduction, one learns of the three stages of the Mystic Way: the Purgative Life, the Illuminative Life, and the Unitive Life. (Smith, 1977, 7): "At the beginning of all must be the [initial] awakening or the conversion of the mystic, who becomes aware of what he seeks, and sets his face toward the Goal." (Ibid.) Compare those words to the following, from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, (as the text is called): Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him." (**Setting one's face toward the goal.**) (Anonymous, 2001, 59)

The mystic has now entered into this Purgative Life, but a long preparation is needed before he can expect to attain (enlightenment), and the discipline of the Purgative Life must first be endured. By repentance, confession, amendment of life, must the self be disciplined. (Smith, 1977, 7)

Again, note the similarities between Smith's definition of the mystical path and those of the twelve-step approach:

4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory. (**Preparation, repentance**) (Anonymous, 1977, 59) 5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. (**Repentance, confession**) (Ibid, 59) 6) Were entirely ready to have

God remove all these defects of character. (**Repentance**) (Ibid.) 7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. (**Repentance**) (Ibid.) 8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. (**Repentance, confession, preparation for amendment**) (Ibid.) 9) Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. (**Amendment**) (Ibid.)

Having engaged in this action phase of preparation, repentance, confession and the making of amends, the mystic is at the stage in which she can continue to practice asceticism more freely, as she is no longer dragging along the spiritual baggage which once encumbered her. In the language of recovery this next stage involves the maintenance steps, steps ten, eleven and twelve. Step 10) "Continued to take personal inventory, and when ... wrong, promptly admitted it." (This step is congruent with Smith's call for continuation of the process on a daily basis, keeping oneself in the present) (Ibid.) Step Ten is the culmination of the "Purgative Life" as Smith referred to it. Next is the "Illuminative Life," as embodied by Step Eleven, in which the recovering mystic seeks "through prayer and meditation to improve [her] conscious contact with God as [she] understood [God], praying only for knowledge of [God's] will for us and the power to carry that out." (Ibid.) It is at this point, in Smith's words,

that the "external life has been brought into accordance with the Good and now the struggle is transferred to the inner life." (Smith, 1977, 8) Thus begins the phase Smith labels the "Unitive Life." This is the moment in twelve step recovery in which the seeker is joined in union with this power greater than herself, or himself, so that she realizes she has accessed the "unsuspected inner resource" (Anonymous, 2001, 570) which allows her to be free of her former compulsion. This moment is an ongoing experience classified as the twelfth step: 12) "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." (*ibid.*,60) This awakening is a real occurrence, as witnessed by "an estimated two million or more (recovering alcoholics), with nearly 100,800 groups meeting in approximately 150 countries around the world." (From the preface to the Fourth Edition of the Big Book, published November, 2001.) Added to these numbers are countless other human beings who have been rescued from other "seemingly hopeless states of mind and body" (*ibid.*,xiii) through the very practical awakenings provided by working the steps.

To reiterate an early point in this chapter then, this journey of recovery, this search for access to a higher power, which culminates in freedom from compulsion, obsession, and addiction, is then, quite arguably a spiritual experience. Again, Smith's language in describing the mystical journey reflects this conclusion as well:

...[T]he mystics seek for union with the One. That union they believe can be attained only by ...the treading of the Mystic Way, so that Mysticism is active and practical; [how much more practical can a program be that turns addicts and alcoholics into productive citizens?] it means discipline and a rule of life, and much upward striving [the steps in their ascendant pattern] before the mystic can hope to attain the heights. Mysticism, since it is permeated through and through by the power of Love, can never be self-seeking, for the end can only be attained by self-stripping; moreover, what is given in full measure to the mystic must be shared with others... (Smith, 1977, 11)

In other words, the mystic, or recovering person, having had a spiritual awakening, must "...carry the message to other[s]..., and practice these principles in all [her] affairs." (Anonymous 2001) Thus, the essence of mysticism lies within the framework of the twelve step spiritual experience. To corroborate this point, I submit that this experience has also been noted as comparable to the process of enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha's concern was with craving, and the suffering that resulted

from such craving. He saw pain as an everyday experience. He also saw that there was no solution devised by humans that would do away with this suffering: "Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; grief, lamentation, pain, affliction, and despair are suffering." (*Schumann* 1973)

The Buddha's profound insight came in the form of seeing suffering as a symptom of a larger issue. The answer was not to kill the pain with drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping, overwork, or excessive piety, but rather to go deep within oneself through the Four Noble Truths and the eightfold path, to the truth of one's relationship to the Universe, or in the case of the 12 steps to the truth regarding one's relationship to one's Higher Power. The connection between the spiritual awakening of the twelfth step and Buddhist enlightenment, especially in the form of the Bodhisattva pledge to postpone Nirvana until all other sentient beings have been released from their suffering is quite apparent (*Sparks*, 1993, 165), as seen in the words of the Twelfth Step:

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps... [the same realization of oneness with the universe experienced by the Buddha under the Bodhi tree] we tried to carry this message to alcoholics [the Bodhisattva pledge to be of service to others]

and to practice these principles in all our affairs [the eight-fold path]. (*Anonymous* 2001)

The Bodhisattva ideal is a sort of cosmic twelfth-step, as the Bodhisattva, having achieved her spiritual awakening, chooses to continue to 'keep coming back' as the saying goes in A.A. parlance. Social relations based on commodification and self-concern leave people mired in the lower levels of existence, trapped by desires born out of fear and despair of attaining something better. This takes us back to the initial point of this project, which was to express a possible way for human beings to have a mystical experience which frees them, to a significant extent, from the bondage of self in all of its manifestations. In following the mystical path outlined as praxis in twelve-step literature, countless numbers of people have been freed from all sorts of addictions, obsessions, and behaviors which once imprisoned them. There is hope for the future, as more and more of these individuals join together in social relations based not so much on self-interest of the commodified sort, but a relationship based on mutuality, service, and love for one another.



## **Chapter 5: One Alcoholic Talking to Another: The Beginning of the Solution**

The goal of this dissertation has been to explore whether and if so, how, the Twelve Step model works to free people from addiction. In my years of research I have seen miraculous transformations, human lives which were once doomed to an inglorious, painful, sad, lonely end redeemed and given meaning through the practice of the Twelve Step principles. I wish to be clear that my intention in this chapter is not to violate any tradition of anonymity, which is very important and I believe has made it possible for the Twelve Steps to proliferate and make the positive impact on culture that it has; having said that, I think that the significance of personal witnesses to this phenomena will be made clearer when I include anonymous experiences of recovery, for I believe these stories illustrate the tension that still exists between the two possible fates, recovery and death, that people in recovery face, both "in the rooms" and in the world in general. Their stories are not over, and neither is that of the species in general, but there are no guarantees either that these people or the many like them will remain on the path

of recovery that saves them from the doom of an alcoholic death, or that human beings in general will find a way out of the trap of selfishness and self-centeredness that is the hallmark of our existence. What they have for today, in this moment, is "a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of [their] spiritual condition." (*Anonymous*, 85) This reprieve consists of the ability to cease, for the time being, from engaging in behaviors which are physically, mentally, and spiritually destructive. It is my educated belief, based on experience over the last quarter century, that it is because of the Twelve Steps, and the fellowship of the groups that I have studied, as well as the service they commit to and seek to perform to the best of their abilities, that they remain free from the compulsion to engage in the addictive processes that they were prisoners of before adopting the Twelve Step ethic. They are liberated. This is a fact for them and a growing number of other human beings who have adopted this way of life as well.

Why does this work for them, when nothing seemed to relieve them of the necessity to ingest harmful substances, up to that very moment when they first received the gift of realization that, of themselves and their own resources,

they were doomed to continue that behavior? The answer, at least partially, seems to lie in that realization and surrender to this knowledge that, of themselves they were unable to do anything about their condition. This realization, or admission, of powerlessness is "the first step in recovery" (30) according to the main text of the recovery canon, commonly referred to as the Big Book. In turn, this admission of powerlessness is regarded as a surrender, the first of many surrenders that those in recovery are called upon to make in order to maintain abstinence.

How then did this process of surrender take place? It has been a transformative process, but not necessarily in the sense that one expects a transformation to take place. This process begins in abject humiliation and hopelessness, and takes one along a path of rehabilitation and reconciliation with those one has become alienated from due to the behavior the addiction promotes. The Twelve Steps are designed to create a real connection with a higher power, a resource of serenity and peace which allows once uncontrollable addicts to make the choice they never had to not use the substance they were addicted to. This connection with a Higher Power is the most important

element of the program, because it is seen by practitioners as the factor in changing their fate from certain spiritual and physical death to a life of meaning. When the recovering person is able to still their unstillable obsessive mind, a mind that operates under the misconception that it is the highest power in the universe, and ignore the physical compulsion that they were doomed to succumb to, and listen for the "still, small voice," (1 Kings 19:15) the intuition, the conscience, the god-within, and do its bidding, life becomes simpler, and easier to live, and one is not compelled to "blot [ ] out the consciousness of [an increasingly] intolerable situation" (25) through the use of alcohol or other substances or processes. This person has been granted a way of life that is more meaningful than their old way of life, and now feels of use in the world in a way that was impossible in the midst of their addiction.

"As a result of the Steps, I have come to the realization that I am part of the goodness that is everything- some people call it God. It is a power I experience deep within myself, as I am able to clear away those things- 'pomp, calamity, and worship of other things' (55)- that block my connection to this power." [I will be quoting excerpts from stories shared within the rooms, but in order to protect anonymity I will not be giving any details that could be used to identify persons.]

But to get to the solution, the recovering person first must talk to someone else, and not just anybody else, for what is needed is a sense of identification, a sense that one is not alone, not experiencing permanent alienation from the world as his alcoholism has convinced him he is. This is how it happened for Bill Wilson, co-founder of AA, who was first visited by his boyhood friend, Ebby Thacher, while he Wilson, was wallowing in alcoholic despair. This is how it happened for Bob Smith, the other co-founder, who was visited by a six-month sober Wilson at his home in Akron, as Smith himself was succumbing to alcoholism. These men and those men and women who followed in their footsteps had discovered a fundamental truth regarding the solution to alcoholism: one alcoholic talking to another, identifying with each other's shared problem and even more importantly transmitting, one from the other, the solution to their disease. Thus has the tradition of telling one's story as part of one's recovery becomes established. This chapter presents these stories, pieces, some larger, some smaller, which these recovering human beings I have come to know have shared with me and others in the rooms, the meetings, of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In order to present these excerpted experiences, I will be using the basic guidelines employed by persons in recovery when relating their story to an audience of fellow recoverers. As stated in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, in Chapter 5 ("How it Works"), "...[o]ur stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now." (58) My intention is to give the reader some idea of the recovery process, from the period of active addiction - "what it was like..." - to the events that precipitated the attempt to get help - "what happened..." - through to various moments in the ongoing process of recovery up to the most recent developments at the time the narrative is being related - "what we are like now."

### **What We Were Like**

How does a person find himself/herself in this place of active addiction, suffering, and powerlessness to do anything about it? Were they born that way? The general consensus within the rooms of recovery programs, and as articulated in the Big Book, is that some are born alcoholic, and that some other addicts/alcoholics at some point in their lives cross a line beyond which they no

longer have a choice as to whether or not they ingest the substance or engage in the addictive process. Many stories have been told over the years since the inception of Twelve Step recovery programs about how people went from an initial stage of experimentation with a substance or process, along a gradual or abrupt path of progressively needing more and more to engage in the addictive activity, until they reached a point at which their choice as to whether or not to do so became practically null. Many have shared in the rooms about having to drink hand sanitizer or mouth wash. This addiction becomes a "rapacious creditor" (TT, 21) exacting an increasingly terrible price for the decreasing amount of relief it offers to the person held in its sway.

In many cases, people begin drinking or using or behaving addictively in a seemingly casual way, sneaking drinks or drugs from their parents' refrigerator or medicine cabinet, and later drinking and/or using with friends in high school. Looking back on their experiences, these people tell of seeing a pattern of behavior connected to their addictive activity, a pattern that starts with the reality that they were in pain and under a great deal of stress as a result of certain factors in their lives. In

the case of Robert<sup>†</sup> the two most prominent of these factors were 1) that he was a bed wetter, which caused him to feel what he later came to know as "incomprehensible demoralization," (Anonymous 1981) and 2) the fear that, because of his particular interpretation of the religious training he had received from his parents and the church community and schools he attended, he was doomed to spend an eternity suffering in Hell for the sins he had committed. He says that by the age of 13, the combination of these two elements left him feeling hopeless, and had he not found alcohol at that point and started drinking on a regular basis, in order to medicate himself from the pain of existence, he may not have survived into adulthood. This story is similar to many others heard in the rooms of recovery.

Once a person has commenced this process of self-medication, the body begins physically craving the substance, and then a mental obsession that somehow the substance must be ingested, no matter what the consequences, becomes established in the mind of the alcoholic, aided in turn by the very craving as the limbic

---

<sup>†</sup> A Pseudonym to protect anonymity



system of the brain becomes dependent on the substance. A vicious cycle ensues, and these physical and mental ailments in turn become integrated with a spiritual "malady" (Anonymous 92) which proponents of the Twelve Step recovery model hold to be the underlying cause of addiction. It manifests most identifiably as a sense of alienation, both from one's friends and family and from the world around them, and, most importantly, from any sense of being connected to a power of goodness that gives one strength to live a meaningful life. The term "Higher Power" is used in the Big Book interchangeably with the term "God" or "God of [one's] understanding" (Anonymous 59) and the belief is that this disconnect from one's Higher Power is ultimately what causes alcoholism. It is also held that once the spiritual malady is dealt with, through the process of 'working' the Twelve Steps, then the mental, emotional, and physical problems will be solved too. The experience of most of those observed during research for this project basically follows this pattern, although most will also admit that they had no understanding of how this process worked when they first faced the reality of their worsening condition and decided to do something about it. One such story is from a middle-aged teacher who tells of

how, in his late twenties, after several arrests, he finally got the message that he was powerless over alcohol.

Here is some of his story:

"I found myself in a drunk tank in a suburb of Los Angeles, where I had been placed by officers of the California Highway Patrol who had noticed my erratic driving on the freeway and pulled me over. They administered a field sobriety test (which I failed, due to the fact that I had been drinking steadily for over 16 hours at that point). I was arrested, and for the next several hours while in custody in the drunk tank I was finally faced with the grim reality of my life up to that point, and also given what I now call a gift, the opportunity to see what my life would be like down the road. What I saw was a lonely old man, existing basically just to drink, as I had pretty much gotten to that point already. I knew then that it was only a matter of time until I would have to let go of all the people that I cared about, and all the hopes and dreams and plans for the future, basically everything that mattered to me, because I had to drink. I couldn't stand how I felt when I wasn't drinking, and I could no longer quell the urge to drink when that feeling came over me. The truth of this dire situation finally broke through the layers of denial that had accumulated over the 13 years or so that I had been drinking and using drugs to drown out the pain, and finally I came to the point where I realized that I needed help. I then said a very simple prayer: 'God, please don't let it be like that.' Almost immediately, as well as I can remember, I felt a sense of ...possibility, that something good could come of the shit that I had gotten myself in, if I could stay in that place of humility that had caused me to ask for help from God. It was a very sincere prayer, perhaps the most sincere prayer that I had uttered since my childhood prayers asking that my little sister be healed of the leukemia she was dying from."

(Death of loved ones is another common element in the stories of those who become addicts or alcoholics. Faced with such a devastating loss, they often find themselves in spiritual crisis.) Another alcoholic tells of the sense of loss and the guilt she felt when her younger brother died:

I didn't stop believing in God, at least not completely, when Timmy died, but his death did change the way I saw the world. I felt guilty at the time of his death for not having treated him kinder. He was my little brother, and he used to get on my nerves, and in turn I would tease him and make him cry. After he was gone, I wanted to take on all the blame and guilt for his death, but I can see now that my motive was sort of selfish. If I could be the one responsible for his death, then that meant I was special, and powerful. I didn't feel special and powerful, but I wanted to be. I thought I should be. I now see that those feelings are natural to some extent, but it is how I responded to those feelings, and how my body responded to the alcohol and drugs that I took to deal with those feelings, that are at the root of my addiction. There is a part of my mind which would like for me to die, and worked (and still works) on me in whatever way it can to alienate me from those people I turned to for love and support. It seeks to take away any sense of being alright or belonging in the world. I also realize that this had started even before my brother's death.  
(Anonymous)

Alcoholics often tell of the shame that they felt on a daily basis:

"I was a bed wetter, but early on so was my younger sister and older brother, so I didn't feel so bad, or alone. But then they stopped wetting the bed, and I became the only one who was still doing so, even after my next little brother was born and finally became toilet trained. It was miserable, and it continued until I was 18. Needless to say, I felt like a freak and a pariah in my own family, and this mind set seemed to be a perfect breeding place for the disease of alcoholism. Shame at the ridicule I faced or was afraid of facing from others who might discover my secret had me on edge most of the time; I was quite relieved when I could sneak a sip of my father's beer or when I came home from school in the sixth grade or so to discover that my mom's sister had sent some of her famous brandied fruit and I could put it on my ice cream and get a nice buzz going. (Anonymous)

Note the palpable sense of shame that this recovering alcoholic remembers experiencing, and even more importantly the relief he then found from ingesting alcohol. The immediacy of the solution is a common element of experience for alcoholics.

Still others tell of feeling terrified as a result of religious teachings passed on to them:

I was struggling with a sense of doom, having taken to heart the message, or at least my interpretation of the message, of my Christian upbringing—that Heaven was a place for those who live a sinless life, and that, since my life already included such sins as gluttony, envy, and ever increasingly, lust, my destination was Hell, where an eternity of unbearable torment awaited me. So when I felt the calming effect of alcohol and marijuana at the age of 13, I didn't feel doomed anymore, at least for a while. As I got older and these urges and emotions got stronger, I

would more and more often feel the need to make myself feel alright, and alcohol and drugs seemed the perfect remedy. (*Anonymous*)

Many relate that their first serious encounter with alcohol and/or drugs was connected to school functions. High school, they report, was a stressful time and kids are faced with choices as to how to deal with the stress. In my research I spoke to more than one person now in recovery who was dealing not only with stress at school, but stressful situations at home as well. Others also faced ostracization by their peers for not having the right clothes or the right haircut, many had to deal with ongoing addiction or alcoholism issues in their families, and so they would turn for solace to others who had found the solution in alcohol and drugs. Here is one story of the stress of high school years and how this person sought a solution in alcohol, primarily:

I first drank to excess in the fall of my freshman year of high school. I was attending a private parochial school in the midwest, I was on the volleyball team, I was a member of social organizations and also student council. On the outside all seemed well, but on the inside I was experiencing strong feelings of shame and fear, because my father was an alcoholic and although outwardly successful, his drinking was leading to business failure and we were living beyond our means to keep up appearances. I also had this sense that even though I seemed to have lots of abilities, I was never going to amount to

anything. And I felt a lot of shame about not being as popular as the pretty girls that attended my school. I was jealous and envious of them, and I had been taught that it was a sin to feel that way, but I didn't feel comfortable confessing those types of sins to the priest at my church. I started to think that I was irredeemable.

"At one point later in the school year I felt like I might have a chance at redemption. There was a retreat held at school in the spring semester and all students were to participate. By that time I had become quite regular at sinning: drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, letting my boyfriend have sex with me while I was drunk; I felt more unforgivable than ever." This is a common theme in the rooms of recovery; the feeling of being irredeemable. Many alcoholics who got their start in their adolescent years express a sense of confusion about feelings and a sense of isolation. Some even credit drugs and alcohol with saving their lives, for if they had not been able to check out in such a fashion the pain of their existence would have been too much to bear. Others tell of parents who were drinkers and drug abusers themselves, and how confusing it was to not have parental guidance regarding their alcohol and drug use. "My mother would come to my rescue, even when I got into some big time trouble. She picked me up from the airport after I had passed out on a plane and caused the landing to be delayed. She met me with a cooler of Coronas to celebrate. I didn't have anyone to turn to for help, I thought."

Typically, but not always, the stories include some kind of legal trouble, but sometimes there is a buildup to that event if a person is in the early stages of their active abuse. Often there is a period in which they start to exhibit behaviors that could be alcoholic, but because the

disease is familial, other family members may not take the first instances of drunkenness or abuse too seriously:

"I had my first encounter with law enforcement, in the form of a ride home from one of my classmate's fathers, who was a police detective. I had been drinking that evening before the dance. When he dropped me off at home I stumbled up the stairs to the porch and pounded on the door. My mother let me in and I sat down awkwardly next to her and my father on the couch. After an uncomfortable minute or so I asked them what movie they were watching; they told me, and then after another very uncomfortable minute or so I stood up, announced I was going to bed (my head spinning madly) and walked across the living room floor to the stairs. As I reached the stairs the spinning in my head started moving down my spine and I felt myself losing my balance, so I got down on my hands and knees and started crawling up the stairs. My mother walked up behind me as I struggled up the stairs and asked me if I had been drinking. (She was familiar with the behavior, as she had witnessed it in my father and some of my older siblings.) A little bit, I answered. She then told me that I was grounded indefinitely. I continued to crawl up the stairs and my mother went back to the living room and sat down again to watch the movie with my father.

"The next thing I remember was waking up the next morning with the worst headache and nausea in my stomach that I had ever experienced in my fourteen years. I opened the window to get some cool air, and my little brother, with whom I shared the room (and who is now sober himself) came bouncing out of his bed onto mine. Stretching out the window, he took a deep breath and exclaimed joyfully: "Fresh air!" He had already learned at a young age the rules of co-dependency and was trying to cheer me up by making me laugh.

"Being grounded did not prevent me from getting drunk again. I had been 'grounded indefinitely' before, and my mom always seemed to forget about me being grounded after awhile. My dad never seemed to

play any role in the disciplining of his children. He was pretty occupied with making enough money to keep his large family supplied with their daily needs. I became ungrounded soon and continued to find opportunities to drink alcohol and occasionally smoke marijuana. My grades didn't suffer too much, although I did begin a pattern of performing well in some classes, like English and History, while struggling with Math and Science. I continued to lead a double life as a popular high school student with a secret problem that I didn't want anyone to find out about. At the end of my freshman year my dad informed the family that we would be moving to another city so that he could get a better paying job and not have to work two and three jobs. I was not happy about this, since it meant I would have to leave my friends and especially my girlfriend behind. When my girlfriend found out I was moving she broke up with me. I experienced deep feelings of loss and rejection, waking up every morning for a while with an emptiness and sadness that was almost unbearable. Yet at the same time there was something almost appealing about these feelings, as if a part of me enjoyed and desired this level of pain. It made me feel alive somehow.

"Of course I was really angry at my father for making me (I didn't really care how my mom or my other siblings felt) move and I blamed him for the loss of my girlfriend. We moved to a much more suburban setting in our new city, and it didn't have the feeling of a neighborhood like our old home town. It was also much more difficult to get around in the suburbs. I could usually walk most places in my old home town, but in this new place there weren't the sidewalks and square city blocks, and it was several miles from my house to the Catholic school that my sister and I were enrolled in. As a transfer student I felt somewhat nervous, but I was determined to fit in, and so I trained all summer, jumping rope and running wind sprints in preparation for football season. As a result of joining the team, which started practicing early August, by the time school started in September I had already made some new friends. I still had my secret that I couldn't tell anyone, and I was still struggling with missing my



girlfriend and my old friends back home. I remember feeling very lonely and taking every opportunity I could to relieve that loneliness with alcohol and marijuana.

"As I continued in my high school career this pattern of tension between my hidden life of shame and foreboding and my outward life as an outgoing, semi-successful student-athlete continued. I won the award for best student in World History in tenth grade, and then was punched in the chest by the same teacher who had given me the award for honking at a pretty girl as I was behind the wheel during Driver's Ed class. The laughter of my buddies in the back seat made the pain of the punch bearable, and by that time I was becoming more and more comfortable assuming the role of irreverent class clown. I was also irreverent at home, and I got the attention I was seeking, albeit negative attention. But at least during those moments I didn't feel so lonely. My resentment towards my father continued to build, mainly because he didn't buy me a car like all my friends' fathers did for them. I had to buy my own car with my money I earned doing odd jobs. I felt different from my wealthier schoolmates.

"In the meantime I had begun to drink more regularly, and to smoke marijuana at least once a week, depending on which friends I hung out with on any given occasion. I always drank no matter what, but the pot smoking was more of a luxury, and at times, a burden. Marijuana did not give me the relief from thinking about my shameful secret or my impending doom. I began to date girls my junior year, after I bought my car. My thinking went back and forth between how to get girls to have sex with me and how much I was going to suffer for my evil ways for all of eternity. Of course there was school work to contend with as well, and my sports activities. I also became involved in Student Council, and I got a couple of part-time jobs, as money was always tight. I managed to graduate from high school and even get accepted to college, although I didn't think I could go because I hadn't earned any scholarships and my parents couldn't pay for me to attend. But I was

determined to give it a try and I worked all summer at a home improvements company, running the five miles to work and back every day, because my car had died on me and I couldn't get it running.

"I attended the state university just about an hour away from my home, starting out in the fall semester, paying my own way. The film "Animal House" about the crazy antics of a struggling college fraternity and their battle with school authorities had opened in theaters just a week before classes started, and so we students imitated art in our lives by attending parties, having food fights in the cafeteria, and attempting and (personally, anyway) failing to get co-eds to have sex with us. I began reading my chosen course texts with gusto, and especially enjoyed the English class I was taking. But I was drinking and smoking both pot and cigarettes, and doing a lot of partying. I had also begun to exhibit a characteristic that was to become more typical as my disease progressed, namely, disdain for authority and the avoidance of any helpful advice from people who knew more than I did, such as academic counselors and therapists.

"By the end of that first semester I had used up my meager resources, and so I was forced to move back home with my parents. My grades had been okay, about a B+ average, and I wanted to continue school, so I enrolled part time at the local city university and took a job as a service station attendant. Soon I was promoted to shift manager, and I took advantage of the position by closing the station early so that I could go out drinking with my friends. I purchased another used car which almost immediately died on me. My father had suggested that I have it checked out before I paid for it, but I didn't want to experience the discomfort of challenging a stranger and risk having them dislike me, so I just went ahead and bought the car, and then got angry at my dad for wondering why I hadn't taken his advice. So another pattern of my co-dependent, alcoholic thinking was beginning to manifest; people-pleasing. I was more concerned with what a total stranger might think of

me than in making a sensible transaction and not throwing away hard-earned money. ( This pattern, or defect of character, has continued to plague me well into sobriety, although I am not as willing to put up with the consequences anymore and therefore I try to not make that mistake in judgment.)

"My drinking continued and increased as I was spending more time with my friends and only had two classes to study for. I was saving money to go back to the state university, and I got a new job working on a landscaping crew with some friends. The four of us rode to work together in the morning, often hung over from the previous evening's activities. There was soon a hierarchy established based on who was most competent with the equipment, and I was at the bottom most of the time, and this usually meant that I was the butt of the jokes that we bantered back and forth. I had begun smoking cigarettes in earnest by that time, as it helped me to feel a part of the crew. My strong suit was playing the buffoon, and making people laugh, which allowed me to fit in a little better. I was also willing to do the trim work with the push mower while the others often fought over the riding mowers. I found it enjoyable to push the mower and get into the tight places where the riding mower couldn't go, singing songs in my head and out loud, forgoing the headphones which were also a popular commodity with my co-workers. I realize now that I was exhibiting another common manifestation of alcoholism - egomania combined with an inferiority complex. On the one hand I had really low self-esteem, while at the same time I thought almost exclusively about myself most of the time, and I usually found some way to think that I was better than those around me; more sensitive, more compassionate, smarter. This characteristic also continues in sobriety, but at least I recognize it now. I am alternately arrogant and self-deprecating, depending on the situation. This seems to be a common feature among alcoholics and addicts, and although these defects have lessened over time, they can still raise their ugly heads in moments of tension and anxiety."

As this person relates, he, like many alcoholics, finally ran into real trouble with the legal system as a result of drinking and/or drugging. A significant percentage of people are introduced to the Twelve Steps by the Court system; in fact, Court Cards or Attendance Verification slips are regularly signed at most Twelve Step Recovery meetings. It is evident that the judicial system believes in the efficacy of the Twelve Steps in addressing the issue of drunk driving and other crimes committed while under the influence. Here is a somewhat characteristic story of a person who had several encounters with the law and finally achieved sobriety:

"My friend and co-worker stopped by the liquor store after work, as we often did. He had a fake ID; I was still underage as well. We were planning on going to another friend's house to do some drinking, which had become the norm. We were pulled over by a police officer and arrested for underage possession of a controlled substance. Besides the alcohol we had just purchased there was also a bag of speed. We were transported to the jail downtown and fingerprinted, placed in the drunk tank, which was full of the early Friday night catch. This was my first night (though not my last), that I would spend in jail for alcohol-related reasons. I remember that there was water on the floor from one of the toilets which had overflowed when this rather scary inebriated fellow stuffed a roll of toilet paper down the drain. Some other men were passed out and laying in the toilet water. As the hours crawled by and the room filled with new arrivals (a wedding reception had been busted for being too noisy and many of the attendees had been arrested and booked), the novelty of my first visit to

jail began to wear off. Reality started to sink in and I began to have a vague understanding that I was in trouble. But at this stage of my alcoholism I was not yet ready to let go of my denial of the truth and see that my trouble was indeed somehow connected to my drinking, much less get anywhere near the understanding that my drinking itself was merely the manifestation of an underlying physical, mental, and spiritual malady. This realization was still some years off, but at that moment all I was aware of was that I had to go to court and get an attorney, and that my parents, who were out of town at that time, were going to be angry and disappointed with me for getting arrested.

"I was still pretty clueless about any other consequences, such as the effect that my arrest might have on my parents and other family members and friends, or the fact that I had reached a point where my body craved alcohol at least every other day. I was then eighteen, and when I got released from jail that first time, I went home and slept, and only mentioned the arrest to my parents in passing, as I was leaving home to go to a party with another friend. I didn't learn much from that first arrest, as evidenced by the fact that while at the party I got drunk again on cognac and scotch. I drank so much that I ended up throwing up in the foyer of my friend's home. Luckily his parents weren't home at the time, and I was able to stay on his couch, otherwise I might have been arrested again on my way home. In hindsight, getting arrested again so soon might have helped convince me sooner that I had a problem. It wasn't until I had been arrested four other times for alcohol-related offenses that I realized I was truly unable to quit drinking on my own. But I still had several years of drinking and drug use ahead of me, and at that point I saw my drinking as somewhat normal, certainly nothing to get too concerned about."

This last account is very familiar to me as it is my own story. The mechanism of my denial, which is a feature

of the psychological makeup of most addicts and alcoholics, had kicked in relatively early on in my alcoholic experience. The need to continue ingesting the substance or engage in the process is so strong that the addict will do whatever it takes to avoid admitting that there is a problem. Sometimes this denial is so strong that people die, and even if they admit they have a problem, this is only the beginning, if they are truly an addict.

Another factor in many of the stories I heard was the pressure felt by those who were attempting to learn to live on their own for the first time. Many alcoholics tell of getting involved in their addiction when they get away from their family of origin and have to face the world on their own:

I felt a great deal of freedom when I went away to college, but soon after arriving and starting the semester I felt homesick. This really struck me as ironic because I never felt like I could get along with my parents and brothers and sisters, but now that I was away from them I did miss them. Some people on my dorm floor invited me to a party at another dorm; they were having a kegger. I went along and soon found myself in control of the beer spigot. I would pour beers for people at the party, and I got to know lots of people that way, but my main purpose was to make sure that I had immediate access to more beer for myself. The feelings of loneliness left me and I had a pretty good time."

Other stories, recounted during speaker meetings or given during panels to hospitals and institutions where alcoholics and addicts have no access to outside meetings, are about how the disease progresses. Alcohol and drugs work for a time for many people who tell their stories in the room, but gradually problems related to alcohol and drug consumption start to occur:

"I only drank alcohol and smoked marijuana my first year of college, but sophomore year my use escalated, and I began to experiment with other substances, namely cocaine, speed, Quaalude, mushrooms and acid. It seemed to be a natural progression, and usually these drugs were introduced to me by a friend or friends who wanted to share their experience with me. At first the experiences were okay, sometimes I even had fun. But they began to distract me a great deal from my studies, and my girlfriend started to complain that I was drunk or high all the time. I switched majors from political science to business, because no papers were required to be written in the business courses, at least not at the intro level. I didn't really like the business courses, but I needed to drink, so..."

Peer pressure does play a strong role in the career of a burgeoning addict/alcoholic, as it becomes important for a person who struggles with low self-esteem, a common characteristic of the demographic, to want to fit in with a group and thus do whatever it takes to do so. Infidelity in relationships is also mentioned quite often:

"I felt deeply insecure about my relationship with my girlfriend, who seemed to be spending lots more time with other friends who didn't drink as much. Ironically, to assuage my insecurities, I attempted to seduce two of her best friends on separate occasions. At least one time was at a party where my actions were quite noticeable. I didn't seem to care who was hurt or embarrassed or angered by my behavior, but I am pretty sure I wouldn't have done those things if I hadn't been able to drink enough alcohol to release my inhibitions. There was definitely something inside me that wanted to do those things, which I guess is part of my disease that I need to address with the Steps."

This person is touching on a key reason for why these personal stories are shared in Twelve Step Recovery meetings; doing so is part of a process of uncovering behaviors and discovering motives so that one can face the truth about themselves and try to act differently in the future. If the recovering person doesn't change behavior, they run the risk of relapse. Sharing these truths is a very humbling, sometimes even humiliating experience, but it seems to be a necessary one for those who wish to continue recovering.

Many of the stories have to do with difficulties with personal relationships. Sometimes it is only later, when the person is in recovery, that they even make a connection to their addictive behavior and such relationship difficulties. They also at times express interesting



insights regarding the underlying issues that both caused them to drink or use, and that caused the relationship problem as well:

"After a couple of years, my girlfriend lost interest in me. At first I blamed it on her, and accused her of fooling around with others and being a sex addict, but I don't really know for sure and now, looking back, I think it had more to do with the way I treated her, and sometimes the way I ignored her, even when I was with her. I was just really caught up in my own shit, you know. Anyway, she broke up with me in the fall of my 4th year in college. We had been through a lot, but I could remember having some good times too. Sometimes I even imagined that we could spend our lives together. Pretty delusional it looks like now. The breakup affected me way down deep, and I went into a tailspin of depression and drinking that I only started climbing out of when I got sober, six years later. Sometimes I feel like I am still climbing out, although I think there were other problems with both my personality and with being depressed that were there before I ever got into a relationship with her. Now I think that depression is part of the overall disease of alcoholism, and I agree with the Big Book where it says that sometimes we need to get outside help."

There is a theme of self-discovery and self-assessment that one hears often in the rooms of Twelve Step Recovery; in fact, this practice of looking at oneself is a very important part of the recovery process and indeed is something that those who attend learn to do from their fellow participants. The inventory steps, four and ten, are especially crucial to developing this ability.

As is true in most cases of those who come to the rooms of recovery, the addictive behavior gets worse, progresses, and as we have seen already, this can lead to legal issues. The narratives also tell of other problems that arise. Legal issues almost seem to be beside the point after awhile:

"I was arrested for drunk driving for the first time after I broke up with my girlfriend. I was convicted and sentenced to community service, and I had to see a counselor as well. She asked me if there was any history of alcoholism in my family and I felt offended. That's funny because looking back I can see that there were tons of drunks in my family, but at that point my denial was very strong. At the same time this was happening I was interviewing for jobs in anticipation of graduation from college. No one seemed interested in hiring me; I'm sure I wasn't making a very good impression, because I was hung over in most of the interviews, and I didn't really want a job in my field anyway. So I began drinking even more, which I didn't think was possible, and I had sex with someone besides my girlfriend for the first time in my life. At first I kind of felt sad, but then I got over those feelings with the help of alcohol, and I started having sex with lots of women over the next several years. It was like I was using sex like alcohol or a drug, to fix me. I kept this up until I met my future ex-wife, who cured me of the sexual addiction, I guess. But I was still drinking heavily.

"I did manage to graduate from college, though, with a pretty mediocre GPA. Like I said, no one wanted to hire me, and it seemed like I was destined to have to move home with my parents, which is what I did do, initially. My prospects were depressingly dim. Now I can see that I was not only depressed, but filled with fear about the future, which I have learned is a common trait of alcoholics. They say alcoholism is a

disease of time. We alcoholics are uncomfortable with our feelings about the past, regretting events and ways we acted, even though I know I can't change what happened. I wished I could 'shut the door' on them. Alcoholics are also uncomfortable with the future, because we feel like we don't have what it takes to deal with whatever might happen. We can't deal with either past or future properly, but we are always thinking about one or the other, so it makes it almost impossible to be in the present moment, unless we can drink or do something else that takes us out of ourselves and our consciousness, which is too painful. So I would do things like drink and do drugs and have lots of sex so I could distract myself from this pain, and I got used to checking out more and more, whenever I would just start to feel anxious.

"I found the perfect job, as a bartender and waiter. his allowed me to continue drinking and soon I got to know the other bartenders and people at other restaurants and bars nearby. I thought I drank a lot in college, but I really stepped it up then. I would get off my shift and go drink at the other places, or I would stay around my own bar if I got off early, although I started having some embarrassing encounters with customers who would come back in telling me how fun I was the night before. The problem was, I had been in a blackout when I met them, and I had no idea who they were."

Many an alcoholic shares such anecdotes regarding the phenomenon of the blackout. A blackout typically occurs when a person ingests a large amount of alcohol in a short period. It is not so much the amount that one ingests, but rather the short time-span in which the ingestion takes

place which causes the blackout.<sup>‡</sup> In any case, these episodes place additional stress on the alcoholic, and an accumulation of such episodes can certainly be regarded as causal in bringing one to that place of "incomprehensible demoralization." (*Anonymous* 30)

As the disease progresses, the sufferer enters a new phase, one characterized more and more by "countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like others." (30):

"...At that point alcohol and drugs were still doing the job, i.e., allowing me just enough of a cushion so that the reality of my existence remained bearable. I could still drink and function relatively well in my job, but there were moments when I would go into a blackout, and at those times I could begin to see that my drinking might have become a problem. What became very clear, and has become clearer as I have participated in recovery, was that my thinking had an almost automatic tendency to turn negative. I would think the worst case scenario was going to happen in a situation; I have learned that this is also typical of other alcoholics in the rooms. I had been going negative for as long as I could remember. It seemed to come from a very deep place inside me, one that I could not recall ever being free of, like a separate creature inside me."

Another area of difficulty that is commonly discussed is the seeking of and maintenance of a livelihood. Employment is a very stressful situation for many, and

---

‡ (Ryback RS (September 1970). "Alcohol amnesia. Observations in seven drinking inpatient alcoholics". *Q J Stud Alcohol* 31 (3): 616–32. [PMID 5458472](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/5458472/). Accessed July 31, 2013, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/5458472>).

depending on the context, can also be quite enabling to one's addiction. Many in the rooms have stories which include working around alcohol and drugs:

"My position as restaurant manager was very demanding, and I contributed to the level of tension by drinking a great deal, as well as using cocaine and marijuana and generally listening to that negative part of my mind which often turned regular situations into crises. I would feel crazy on the inside, while on the outside I appeared relatively calm. A good amount of decompression was absolutely required at the end of a typical workday, thus justifying heavy drinking well into the early morning hours, ending inevitably with horrible hang-overs. Upon occasion, I would also engage in a sexual liaison, which always left me feeling emptier and guiltier than I had before. I wasn't able to connect on any kind of deep level with any of these women, and, as a result, found myself beginning to establish a pattern that would continue for several years well into sobriety; the pattern of being attracted to women who were unavailable." The inability to have a true relationship with another human being is also claimed as a characteristic of alcoholics and addicts. (Twelve and Twelve, Step 4, 53) This particular narrative continues to illustrate this trait:

"At first, such unavailability manifested for me in the form of women who were either married or in a committed relationship of their own. Most of the time, to their credit, these women would not play along, but their acquiescence or refusal was almost beside the point. At some level, I felt so wrong about even a normal level of sexual longing that I wanted to break the rules, as if by doing so I could strike a blow against the unjust system that I believed had already condemned me for much less egregious behavior. Additionally, I had every intention of inflicting pain on other men the way I had been wounded when my girlfriend had cheated on me. Not a good motive at all, to understate the point.

Nevertheless, with the exception of one person who I did have a brief relationship with, most of my encounters over that five year span were somewhat illicit in nature.

"Redemption appeared late in the second year before I finally got sober, when I returned from a 'vacation' to a job as a waiter/bartender at a local bar that also specialized in Mexican food. I had drank myself out of the job as manager at the other place, but I still had some connections and was able to find employment. At the new job I met Her. She seemed to like me. She had a boyfriend at that time, so of course, I became exceedingly intrigued with her. We began betting on the outcome of the baseball games that were always being broadcast on the bar TV and if my team won (which they weren't doing much of that season), she would buy me a drink at the bar down the street that we hung out at after our shifts. However, if my team lost (which they did quite often), I would buy her a drink. I ended up buying her many more drinks than she bought me. This was as I planned it, for that allowed me to come across as generous and a good sport. As it turned out, I really was very fond of this woman. She had a delightful sense of humor, as well as a very expressive face. She was physically well-toned and healthy, and I was drawn to her nose and lips, which I found to be very attractive and sensual. She didn't seem to mind my attention at all.

"We had been flirting back and forth over what seemed like forever, but in retrospect, must have been only a few weeks (which, when one is a 25 year old male who has been used to one-night stands for most of his sexual career, seemed an eternity!) One night, I finally had the nerve to kiss her. Simply for appearances only, I half-heartedly expressed "concern" for the other man she was dating. She told me they were most likely not going to stay together and that she didn't seem interested in her anymore either. After receiving this bit of information, I felt emboldened to move forward with her. I felt a warmth in our connection that had eluded me from my previous liaisons. Of course I wanted to take the circus all

the way to the border! Much to my dismay however, she firmly but kindly declined my initial advance, as well as further ones. It forced me to stumblingly control myself and to make a sincere effort to act like a 'gentleman'.

"We were constant companions from that night on, working together and going out with mutual friends from work. We discovered a physical and emotional connection, one that I hadn't experienced since my days with my girlfriend in college, and I felt as though I had met the woman of my dreams. Of course I was still drinking, and she would attempt to keep up with me, but it soon became apparent that my idea of the necessary amount of liquor needed to get the job done was much different than hers. She began going home at a much earlier time, and I would call a cab or catch a ride home with a friend much later in the evening. We weren't living with each other yet, but I was spending most of my free time with her, either at her apartment or the house I shared with two other roommates. One of my roommates at that time, Joe W., was actually a sober gentleman who was in recovery, but I was clueless regarding his situation and completely mindless of his condition. My alcoholism continued to develop, yet at the very same time, I began attempting to control the amount that I drank. I tried to convince myself I was trying to control my drinking 'for Her sake'. The truth, however, was that I was attempting to manage the situation I found myself in because it was becoming too stressful to me. I could see that I had a good thing going in my new relationship and I didn't want to ruin it. Looking back now, it is sadly ironic that our relationship actually survived my drinking, but it didn't survive my alcoholism. After 8 1/2 years together, we ended up splitting up on my AA birthday."

This last comment illustrates a fact that, for many in recovery, the realization dawns only slowly, as they participate in their program, that their substance abuse is

only symptomatic of the underlying illness, and many struggle well into recovery with relationship issues.

The struggles of living while under the influence of substances are still prevalent in the minds of many in recovery. Remembering how bad things got is helpful in bringing the recovering person back to a place of gratitude for their present condition of sobriety. So they do continue to talk about what it was like, in order to set the stage for the newcomer to the program who can't imagine that others have been in similar situations to the one they just left. Many a story tells of attempts to control the substance abuse without quitting altogether:

"... I began thinking about what kinds of changes I could make in my life that would make me a more desirable partner (other than quitting drinking, of course - that wasn't even a consideration!). I began looking for jobs in sales. While working as a bartender, I noticed that quite a few of my customers seemed to have a lot of money, as well as time to drink during the day. When I inquired how they managed to pull this off, most of them told me it was because they were in sales. In that case, becoming a salesman seemed to be just the ticket! Plenty of free time to drink as well as a lot of expendable income to feed my growing need for alcohol. That was my thinking at the time, always looking for a way to keep drinking, because by that time I had to.

"My girlfriend and I continued to get more involved with one another, even though my drinking hadn't really slowed down. I tried to cut back, at least when I was around her, and that usually worked,



but then when I was by myself it seemed like I always 'wanted' a drink. I also felt guilty that I was still interested in other women. I had just met my girlfriend's parents on a weekend visit to her hometown. As I was still pretty good at first impressions, in spite of the fact that I was somewhat inebriated even on that occasion, I managed to charm them and they seemed to like me. My girlfriend's mom was kind and beautiful, with a witty sense of humor. Her father was a different type of cat. A successful sales engineer for a large corporation, I found him to be staunchly conservative in his political beliefs. Without concern for the fact that some people may not believe the same way, he would not hesitate to 'share' his beliefs with anyone who may be within earshot, which, being liberal, irritated me to no end. I have since discovered in recovery that the reason I was so hyper-aware of his strong personality traits is that they mirrored my own. Nevertheless, he seemed to approve of me and think I had potential for a good career in sales, and that, therefore, I was an acceptable contestant for his daughter's hand in marriage. I seemed to be on my way to a life that anyone could be happy with. If only I could stand how I felt when I wasn't drinking..."

### **What Happened**

Continuing with the current narrative, the reader can see how a typical story of 'hitting one's bottom' plays out:

"This girl had an older sister who was married and lived out West with her husband in a lovely beach community on the Pacific Ocean. We visited them and while there I contacted an old college roommate. He offered me a job in sales and I took it. I moved out to this new place, by myself, although my girlfriend and I made plans for her to move out later. My new job was somewhat stressful. I had to make lots of cold-calls prospecting for new business, and I wasn't used to asking people to buy things from me.. My territory was large, but most of the good accounts were already handled by another salesman who had been there for

awhile. I began spending more and more time drinking, and I had to do lots of driving, so, inevitably, I was arrested for drunk driving. It was not the first time that I had been in jail because of my drinking, but something seemed different about this time. I had become more isolated, being without my girlfriend for several months. I had also moved into an apartment with several people so that I could afford the rent, and one of them had recently participated in an intervention on his father, who was alcoholic. Sadly, the intervention had failed, but my roommate had come home from the intervention attempt armed with a great deal of information about alcoholism, and he proceeded to pass that information on to me. Thus, by the time I had woken up on that fateful morning of my arrest, I had a pretty good idea that I was addicted to alcohol, but I hadn't quite admitted to my "innermost self" \* that I was alcoholic. Not until after my arrest later that evening did I finally come to the realization. I don't remember exactly what time it was, but at some point that evening, after drinking all day at several locations, I was pulled over by a Sheriff's deputy and his trainee, a female officer who was so excited and nervous about her first arrest that she left the paperwork on top of the squad car as she drove away. I saw the panicked look in her eyes as she glanced over to her supervisor, and from my observation point in the rear seat, as I sat with my hands cuffed behind my back, I leaned forward and said, "It's gonna be okay."

"Those words seemed to ring true for my own situation. I felt as if the arrest was exactly what I needed, an intervention by God through the hands of the Sheriff's Dept. I was booked and placed in the drunk tank, and despite it being a weekend, it was not crowded. In fact, there was only one other occupant, a guy maybe just a little older than me. We exchanged greetings, and he began telling me how he had come to be in this place. I was still somewhat intoxicated, which made me somewhat talkative, so I had already given him the details of my arrest. I remember some of what he said, and particularly that this was his second arrest in six months for drunk driving. He said that he was engaged to be married and that all his friends drank

and that he couldn't imagine not drinking. I identified completely. Then he said that he was afraid he would lose his fiancée. That really hit me, and I went off into a reverie of my own, in which I had a vision of myself as a lonely old man with no one in my life, because I had to drink no matter what.

"At that moment, I was struck with the knowledge of my impending doom, (this vision that I was having), and I said a simple prayer to the God that I thought I had severed all ties to yet who I felt was right there with me in that moment of need, and this is the prayer: "God, please don't let it be like this." I don't recall any other words, and the next thing I experienced was being in a real dark space, in which a tiny light way off in the distance made its debut in my field of vision, like one of those exams at the ophthalmologists to check for glaucoma. A little pinprick of light made itself known to me, and in that light I felt hope, that maybe there was a way out of the darkness that I had found myself in. I decided to focus my attention on this light, and as I did, my surroundings in the jail cell became visible again. I was again aware of my fellow prisoner, and I said to him that it was all going to be alright, the second time I had used that phrase in the last few hours. Again, I don't remember his response so much, but I remember that feeling of hope starting to build within me.

"Finally later that morning my jailer summoned me for release. My fellow prisoner had already been released, and yet I hadn't been bothered by this seeming favoritism. I had a new sense about me that things were indeed going to be alright. I didn't know how this was to be yet, but I felt certain, somewhere deep within me, that my hope was warranted.

"I was released on my own recognizance and allowed to drive myself home. I was exhausted from having been up for 24 hours, so I collapsed on my bed for a couple of hours, and then called my girlfriend, who was living in another town at the time. I told her that I had been arrested and that I was an

alcoholic and needed help. This was the first time I had admitted my problem to anyone, and she was very accepting of the notion, and very supportive, and I will always be grateful to her.

"She got off the phone with me and called someone, I am not sure who, but then she called me back and suggested I call Alcoholics Anonymous. What is remarkable about this is that I had been to meetings at my friend's recovery home, but I had not made the connection myself that morning in jail, that I needed the kind of help I saw people seeking. I just knew that there was hope. Remembering how I was re-introduced to AA by someone else's suggestion, without any thought of my own, is another reason for gratitude.

"I called the number for Alcoholics Anonymous Central Office in a town near where I lived, and a gentleman named Joe, who subsequently became my first sponsor, cheerfully answered the phone. I told him that I was an alcoholic and that it had been suggested that I call AA. I also mentioned lots of other things that were going through my head, including my concerns that I might lose my job if I were to go into a treatment center. Joe addressed my concerns, calmly suggesting that he could save me lots of money and perhaps my employment by meeting me at a meeting. He suggested a meeting in the town I was living in, but I didn't want to go to a meeting there, because I felt that the local people were not quite at my level of sophistication! Yes, I was manifesting the ego-maniacal portion of the ego-maniac/inferiority complex which the Alcoholics Anonymous program has generally adopted to describe most alcoholics.

"So I found myself at my first 12 Step meeting, in the nearby city, on a Sunday night. As I drove down to the meeting, I felt a little bit nervous, but mostly I felt hopeful. Something had happened to me in the past 24 hours that I had not experienced for a long time. I had been in a very dark place, and had felt hopeless and alone, and I now felt that something had come into that dark place and renewed me, and was

now bringing me to a new place full of light and possibility. I parked my car in a parking lot next to a golf course. The meeting started at 7:30 and the sun had set. I as approached the meeting place I saw several people standing around, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. I don't remember talking to any of them, although I may have because I was supposed to meet Joe there. After a moment or two of looking around the room, which was about half-full of people, some sitting, some standing around the coffee pot, I saw a gentleman who fit the description Joe had given of himself. I approached him and indeed it was Joe. We had talked awhile on the phone, so I felt pretty comfortable with our first actual physical encounter. He was dressed like a cowboy, which I later learned had to do with his Montana roots, but he also was wearing flashy jewelry and a toupee. He had a gleam in his eye, and was very friendly. He introduced me to several people and briefly gave them the details of our conversation and made sure to emphasize that I was a newcomer. This seemed to be a very important piece of information, because every person then re-greeted me with a warmth that they hadn't quite shown before. I later learned that newcomers were very important, some would say the most important person in the room. My ego liked this notion, and I still believe this to a certain extent, although my understanding now is that the importance of the newcomers is to give the already sober alcoholics something or someone beside themselves to think about, thus freeing them from the bondage of self which is symptomatic of the disease of alcoholism.

"At that first meeting, which was ostensibly a speaker meeting, there seemed to be a few hundred people. I was not mentally prepared for such numbers but something else inside me gave me the sense of calmness and peace that I needed to step into the room, get some coffee, locate Joe, and find a seat. I said the meeting was ostensibly a speaker meeting because the speaker had not shown up, and so the leader was calling on various members to come to the podium and share their experience, strength, and hope with the rest of us. At the beginning of the meeting they asked if there were any newcomers present. I noticed some people raising their hands and so I did

the same. This action seemed to reinforce my growing sense of possibility of redemption that I had been struck with when I had admitted my powerlessness in jail and had asked a God I realized I knew very little about to save me from the fate I had envisioned. Several people went to the podium that evening and spoke 'in a general way' regarding their experience with being an active drunk, what had happened to alter this condition, and what their lives were like now. That feeling of hopefulness that had come upon me in the jail cell continued to grow. I became sold on the 12 Steps as a solution to my problem, and I have remained sober from that day until the present moment. My problem, or what my understanding of what my problem is, has changed - I thought my problem at that time was that I drank too much. I had no idea that I had been using alcohol as a low-level solution to my real problem, which was conscious existence. I drank to drown out the consciousness of my intolerable situation, and I had to find a Power greater than my self which could make that existence tolerable, and allow me to live usefully in this world.

"By continuing to attend meetings, talk to my sponsor, and meet other people, I was basically demonstrating my acceptance of the first and second steps. I had admitted that I was powerless over alcohol, that of myself, left to my own devices, including my thinking, my life was unmanageable. I also began to notice evidence of alcoholic unmanageability as I watched others struggle with their own alcoholism. Some seemed to be really serene and others seemed to be really frantic, and as I stayed around, I witnessed many who could not stay sober. For a number of reasons it is difficult for an alcoholic to stay sober, as I was learning. This made me even more grateful for every day that I remained free of the obsession to drink, and as the days began accumulating, I became more and more conscious of a new sense of power within myself which was somewhat directly related to my participation in the 12 Step program; the meetings, the fellowship, and the reading of the Big Book, which is said to be the 'text' of the recovery program. Joe didn't believe in "working the steps" as the recovery component of the 12 Step model

is sometimes referred to as, so I was stuck working them myself as I was too codependent at that point to pick another sponsor who actually could take me thorough the steps. I try to this day to introduce the newcomer to the program as it is outlined in the Big Book.

"So some people were staying sober while showing up for their own recovery, and some seemed to struggle to get even a few days of recovery, and as I observed this chain of affairs, I was reminded of what is written in the beginning of Chapter 5 of that text: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not give themselves to this program. These men and women are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves." I was somewhat afraid, for many years actually into sobriety, that I might be one of those constitutionally incapable persons, so I made an effort to go to lots of meetings. I had heard that "Meeting makers make it", which is just one of several pithy sayings that one hears in the rooms, and like the others, there seems to be a grain of truth. Most of the people I know who have been here a while, including myself, have attended a great number of meetings."

#### **What We Are Like Now**

Attendance at meetings, in itself, is not the solution, however. What is the solution? "There is action and more action." (Anonymous 88) The "program" of the 12 Steps is Three-Fold. In the front of the AA Big Book is the AA symbol, a triangle inside of a circle. The circle represents the whole, all in one, and within this oneness

is the triangle, three components which make up this oneness. These three components are: Unity (the fellowship), Recovery (the steps), and Service (the 12th step). The metaphor most often used to explain the necessity of all three components is a three-legged stool. The stool is only useful with all three legs. If one leg is removed, the stool is not useful anymore, because it is out of balance. Just so, the program needs all three components - Unity, Recovery and Service - to be truly effective. Of course, there are some people who can get by on just one or two components - just meetings, or just speaking (service), but almost inevitably, if one is truly alcoholic, they will drink again or use some substance, because they need all three components to remain connected to the Higher Power that is accessed. "Faith without works is dead." (James, 2:21, 26) The Big Book quotes James, and in addition, there is a whole chapter, "Into Action", which explains the process. "Into Action" follows "How It Works", also known as Chapter 5. In most AA meetings, portions of Chapter 3, "More About Alcoholism" and Chapter 5, "How It Works" are read before the participation begins.

There are several types of meetings in most 12 step programs. One type is the speaker meeting, where a group



of recovering persons, usually larger than at other meetings, listens to the experience, strength and hope of a single speaker; their experience both with the disease and with recovery, the strength they have acquired by participating in recovery through the Twelve Steps, and the hope that they have of the continuance of meaning in their lives, as long as they remain abstinent. Some variations of speaker meetings include a question and answer session, but most do not. Another form of meeting is the early morning Attitude Adjustment, which basically functions as its name describes. Recovery members show up to get their attitudes adjusted so that they can stay sober while going about their day with a modicum of civility, if all goes as planned. Sometimes one may attend a noon meeting as well, to get a renewed sense of purpose. Noon meetings are usually smaller, but not always, and they are usually a participation meeting, in which the leader shares briefly and either selects others to share directly, or calls for a round-robin. The round-robin meeting is one in which the leader picks the first person to share, and then that person calls on someone else. Sometimes this meeting includes a selected topic for all participants to share about, but quite often the subject matter is left open to

each individual participant, with the strong suggestion that one's sharing be about their experience with alcoholism.

There is some controversy in the fellowship about what sharing one's experience with alcoholism means. According to Tradition Five of the Twelve Traditions of AA (See Appendix B) there is a "singleness of purpose" guideline which keeps groups focused on recovery from alcoholism. Some interpret this to mean that one should never mention drug use (besides the drug ethyl alcohol) in their "pitch". Others see alcoholism as a larger issue, and that alcoholics seek a power greater than themselves in many forms, including alcohol but also other drugs and other substances and processes. In fact, there are over 200 groups that use the Twelve Steps as their primary ethic of transformation. Those who hold to this interpretation are more comfortable sharing about drug use, and it is rare nowadays that there are any "pure" alcoholics, i.e., those who only drank and never used other drugs. Of those who did only drink, there are many who realize, in sobriety, that this "choice" was more a matter of circumstance and/or preference than a matter of exclusivity. Some "pure alcoholics" even relate experiences in sobriety in which

they felt compelled, strangely drawn, to some other addictive substance or process, and whether they succumbed or not, realized that their alcoholism was more than just a physical addiction to alcohol. "[Drinking alcohol] was but a symptom" (64) of a deeper underlying malady, ultimately a separation from a vital element of one's being that made it possible to live life free from the craving and obsession that are most definitely characteristics of the alcoholic. Most participants in meetings at present are open to the notion that there will be other substances and processes mentioned in a pitch or a discussion, but there remains a remnant of those who are offended at such a mention and sincerely believe that quelling such discussion is a form of protecting the program's professed idea of singleness of purpose. The following is a lengthy excerpt from the online, unpaginated book *Spiritual Solution* (Simple Enlightenment Press P.O. Box 312, Upper Black Eddy, Pennsylvania 2012), Kindle Edition. , written by John H, a recovering alcoholic:

One of the great misunderstandings in AA is what is meant by singleness of purpose. Singleness of purpose means that we share one purpose, recovery from alcoholism through the 12 steps. We are not concerned with solving each other's unique individual problems or emotional upsets. We are in AA to solve our COMMON problem, alcoholism. Singleness of purpose means that

during AA meetings, we have no interest in politics, the environment, religion, sports, or the new hot TV show. We do not introduce psychotherapy at meetings, or exercise programs, or vitamin therapy, or any specific connection to a particular church as a means of recovery. We do not get involved in any other topic that would detract from our primary purpose of staying sober and helping other alcoholics achieve sobriety. Singleness of purpose does not mean that we never discuss substances other than alcohol and it certainly does not mean that a member who was also addicted to drugs other than alcohol should be made to feel uncomfortable discussing their use of other drugs.

"From the beginning of AA, those with addictions to other substances were welcome in AA and were of utmost importance to the early years of AA. In one of the most referred to stories in The Big Book, "Acceptance Was The Answer", (417) the writer talks of his addiction to Benzedrine, tranquilizers, codeine, Percodan, and intravenous Demerol and morphine. The recovering alcoholic doctor writes: "Giving up alcohol was not enough for me; I've had to give up all mood and mind affecting chemicals in order to stay sober and comfortable." (411) He also writes "Today I feel I have used up my right to a chemical peace of mind." (416) If a story about a recovering drug addict AND alcoholic is included in The Big Book, should we not be tolerant of those who are also addicted to substances besides alcohol?"

No matter what type of meeting, there are usually some common elements to every meeting. Almost all meetings in AA begin with the Serenity Prayer. There are usually readings of pieces of literature from the Big Book. Typically, portions of Chapter Three, "More About Alcoholism", Chapter Five, "How It Works", and the Twelve Traditions, which are located in one of the appendices of

the Big Book. These are read at different times depending on the established meeting format, which is determined by those who started the meeting. At the end of the meeting someone reads either "The Promises" from page 84 of the Big Book or "A Vision For You", from page 164. The meeting is concluded, after announcements and other business such as celebration of sobriety birthdays, with either the Serenity Prayer or the Lord's Prayer.

## **Chapter 6: Why the Twelve Step Model Works**

Transformation. That is both the key to why meetings are so important to the recovery process, and why the recovery process itself works as a this-worldly soteriology. Transformation that is taking place within the individual as a result of the steps is then manifested and witnessed by those who attend meetings. When one's circumstances lead them to the realization that they are powerless (over alcohol or any other substance or process) they find themselves at Step One. If they are fortunate enough, this moment of clarity will lead them to the only conclusion that makes any sense to them, namely that they must have a power by which to live (45), or they are doomed to an alcoholic fate, which means incarceration or institutionalization and eventually death. Thus, they are lead to Step Two, in which they come to believe, or are at least willing to believe, "that a Power greater than themselves can restore them to sanity." (59) If a person has completed the first step, as evidenced by the fact that they have reached out to someone else for help, then they have completed Step One, and if they have started going to meetings, either on their own or through the direction of a

hospital program, they are manifesting the required belief that is called for in Step Two. In other words, when a person goes to a second meeting, it can be argued that they are showing willingness to believe that the program, a power greater than themselves indeed, can restore them to sanity, wholeness, and the ability to choose not to partake in the substance or process they are addicted to. And when this same person turns to another recovering person and asks for "help in working the steps" or "sponsoring" them (2 terms that probably should be synonymous but are not always so) they are "making a decision to turn their will (thoughts) and their lives (actions) over to a Power greater than themselves (Step 3)." This step often confuses the newcomer to recovery, because there is an expectation that something actually happens when this step is taken. It is then pointed out to the newcomer (usually by someone who made the same mistake themselves) that this step is only a decision, and must be followed at once "by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions."

(63) Step 3, then, is the decision to work the action steps 4 - 10, which, if done thoroughly, will lead to real

transformation. There are even promises of such transformation implicit in the 3rd step, as enumerated in the first paragraph on page 63:

When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow, or the hereafter. We were reborn. (63)

Usually, when promises are mentioned in the context of the Twelve Steps, The Promises are those enumerated in Chapter 6, "Into Action" (83) and refer to those changes that take place during the amends process, which is Step 9. (Those will be discussed further in this text.) Yet, here are bona fide promises made, all the way back in Step 3, that have to do with the gradual spiritual awakening that most practitioners of the 12 Steps experience. Already, even before the action steps 4 - 10, a transformation is beginning to take place. By just deciding to turn one's thoughts (will) and actions (lives) over to the guidance and care of this loving Power, a Power which can only be found ultimately deep within oneself, one's life begins to



change for the better. There is a subtle yet ever so significant difference in the way one experiences life as a result of the steps, and Step 3 is just the beginning. And yet, so much freedom from fear is implicit in this decision to turn one's will and life over to the care of this loving Higher Power. Imagine being free from concern about one's very needs? Yet, there are countless anecdotal examples shared in the rooms of recovery of that very situation taking place in real life. People become gainfully employed and are able to pay their bills and feed themselves and their loved ones. Certainly there are financial concerns to be dealt with, as the Steps are not a path to transcendence of everyday life. Rather, the Steps are a path to transforming the experience of everyday life from one of care, worry and mundane drudgery, to the miracle that life seems to have been meant to be. As one makes this decision and then at once embarks on "a thorough housecleaning" (64), one becomes employable in the real world, and able to resume careers halted by active alcoholism, or go back to school to train for a new career. And that is just the surface benefit of what the 3rd Step decision leads to. How much freedom is there in becoming "less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans

and designs."? (63) What this freedom brings us is the ability to live life generously, giving of one's self from the very depth of one's being, and the ability to truly be unafraid of the future. As this awakening takes place, one becomes aware that a universe run by a petty, punishing God who planned a place of eternal torment is a virtual impossibility. It just does not make any sense anymore to the gradually awakening practitioner, and so layers of pain, guilt and dread are stripped off to uncover the true compassionate, empathetic, forgiving being that lies at one's true core. This is the new power flowing in, and through, the practitioner. With this new sense of power does come peace of mind, as promised, and the knowledge that somehow life can be lived without the need for substances or processes that were once used to get out of one's fear-based preoccupation with themselves. As the recovery process continues, one is filled with the presence of this new Power in a way that is different, but not impossible, to describe. It is basically a real feeling that everything is the way it is supposed to be at that very moment, and that there is really nothing to fear. But as the Big Book goes on to remind the reader, this decision to turn one's thoughts and actions over to the

care of this loving presence "could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us." (64) This "strenuous effort" is the 4th Step inventory.

Taking inventory is an important part of recovery life. A spiritual inventory, referred to earlier as ethical self-assessment, is valuable on many levels. Key among the benefits received from such an exercise is the freedom one receives from the disillusionment one undergoes when dispelled of the notion that somehow one's problems are another's doing; that one is the victim of their circumstances. As the inventory process ensues, as the practitioner goes back through the events of their life, examining resentments, fears, and relationships (sexually intimate or otherwise), they are faced with the realization that, indeed, those people, institutions, and principles towards which they have been resentful did play a part in their troubles, but that ultimately there was some choice made by themselves which put them in the position from which the resentment stemmed. In other words, their "troubles...[were] of [their] own making." (62) This realization is vital because without it the practitioner

remains bound by that chain of resentment to its object, and until this chain is broken, must relive (resent) the wrong done to him, perceived or real. But once this realization becomes actualized, once they have gotten to the fourth column of the inventory, in which they look at their own part in any resentment, they are then able to see that they indeed have played a major role in keeping the resentment alive, and are thus empowered to do something about the resentment. The text of the Big Book gives clear instructions as to what to do in such a case: "When a person offended we said to ourselves, 'This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.'" (67)

As this process of realization of one's own complicity and the resultant ability to forgive unfolds, the practitioner is gradually freed from the chains of resentment that have held him in bondage, and becomes free from the compulsion and obsession to drink and/or use drugs, and free to live life on a whole new basis. The inventory step moves on to the next level of difficulties, underlying the resentments, identified as fear. The fear inventory is a subsection of the 4th Step, because, as the founders realized, with the help of their precursors in the

Oxford Group, fear is a major component of the disease of alcoholism/addiction. "It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it." (67) The text is elegant in the simplicity of instruction on how to deal with these fears: "We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them." (68) These simple instructions provide a template for inventorying one's fears, consisting of a column for the fear itself, by name, and a column for why the fear exists in the first place. Then the text offers a simple solution, preceded by a powerful declaration of what the Twelve Steps can accomplish, which is to bring one into a relationship with a Higher Power that can "fully solve the fear problem." (68) First, the declaration:

We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity. We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. (68)

Then, the solution: "Instead we let Him demonstrate, through us, what He can do. We ask Him to remove our fear

and direct our attention to what He would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.”(68) The implicit promise here is that fears can be overcome, but this is made possible by the reliance on and relationship with an infinite, all-powerful Higher Power that is accessed through practicing the Steps.

The next level of inventory is introduced right away, and comes along at the perfect place, after one has dealt with resentments and fears, as this third level has to do with aspects of one’s personality which are even more deep seated and detrimental, if possible. It could even be argued that this third level is directly contributory to the resentments and fears, and this is so because this level has to do with actual existential shame, which manifests most frequently in one’s intimate relationships. Hence, this section of inventory begins with a sentence that is infamous in the rooms of recovery for its ability to induce real levels of discomfort: “Now about sex.” (69) Many a participant in a book study, newcomer or old timer alike, has squirmed uncomfortably when it is their turn to read and they see these words awaiting them. The truth is that the text does not go into any great length regarding the discussion of sex itself, but rather, after a brief

explanation of its position of neutrality regarding the actual practices people engage in, it explains: "We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct. We all have sex problems. We'd hardly be human if we didn't." (69) The text does then get to the essence of the problem by giving these instructions:

We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it...In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test-was it selfish or not? We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed. (69)

Such a clinical approach is quite helpful for people who have attached a great deal of shame to their sexual experiences and thus were resigned to never being able to deal with them in a practical way. These instructions clearly give the practitioner a structure by which to examine those relationships and accompanying behaviors, and then promise that if followed, this action will help "to shape a sane and sound ideal for [a] future sex life." With this section of the inventory completed, and done so diligently, one has taken the 4th Step, and "swallowed some

big chunks of truth" (70) about themselves. Then they are ready to "admit to God, to [themselves], and to another human being the exact nature of their wrongs." (59) This will be the 5th Step in the process of recovery.

My experience with the steps could be described as somewhat atypical, but for the fact that there is no truly 'typical' experience in working the Steps. Everyone experiences the process differently, but this process is designed to produce one result: a spiritual awakening, an awakening to the awareness of one's true relationship to the ultimate. No one spiritual experience is identical to another. Bill Wilson, the primary author of the Big Book, realized this truth and made it clear in Appendix II of the text, which is titled "Spiritual Experience." Wilson writes here in an attempt to dispel the notion that all spiritual awakenings are "in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals," (567) an event in which the practitioner is immediately conscious of the presence of a higher power, and is thus restored to complete wholeness at that moment. Wilson does imply that those types of spiritual experience do occur, and his story tells of his own immediate spiritual experience. (Chapter 1, "Bill's Story", 14) Yet



in "Spiritual Experience" Wilson is intent to add that this is "[h]appily" (567) not the required process of most in recovery. Rather, most people have an experience of "the educational variety" (Ibid.) which he says is a spiritual awakening as a culmination of many actions taken over sometimes very long periods, and that one experiences the benefits of such a gradual awakening over the course of one's sobriety. What is required is a willingness to work the steps and participate in the fellowship, a rigorous honesty in the conduct of one's affairs, both within the program and in one's daily life (which, if the practitioner is working diligently, quite often become one and the same), and an open-mindedness about the world, one's life, and especially, one's relationship with a power greater than oneself. Wilson assures his readers that they can only be thwarted in their pursuit of such an awakening by "an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial." (568) Finally, he warns the readers that there is a barrier that can in fact prevent their experience of a spiritual awakening, one that encapsulates the anti-thesis of the willingness, honesty, and open mindedness required for such a winning result, and this barrier is, he says, borrowing the words of contemporary social scholar Herbert Spencer:

"...contempt prior to investigation." (Ibid.) The message is clear: a spiritual awakening is possible for anyone who sincerely seeks the experience.

Sincerely seeking the experience, for most alcoholics, anyway, is a task easier said than done. Some do not make it to the point of actually working the steps; but many may get to the point of actually making it into the rooms; many are able to stay around long enough to go through the entire process; a number of people reach long term sobriety, but, of those numbers, none are guaranteed ongoing sobriety. All any recoverer gets is a "daily reprieve" from their addiction "based on the maintenance of their spiritual condition." (85) In other words, the Twelve Steps model works one day at a time, or one period of consciousness broken by sleep at the end of a day. Sometimes this day must be broken up into smaller increments, in stressful times particularly, so that one day at a time becomes one hour, or one minute, or even one breath at a time. Relapse is a constant possibility for some, and a reality for all. Nevertheless, there are millions of people who have recovered from "seemingly hopeless state[s] of mind and body." (xiii)

Working the steps is a dynamic process. The person who has worked their way through all of the steps and continues to practice the principles of recovery and is having a spiritual experience scarcely resembles the person who came into the program. This very same person, having had this awakening, experiences the world in a wholly different way. A key element of this new experience is an inner directedness, an innate sense of what to do next in most moments of the day. This inner directedness is, of course, contingent on the status of one's spiritual condition, one's relationship with a higher power, which the practitioner seeks to maximize through the working of Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, also known as the maintenance steps, on a daily basis. Step Ten calls for a continual assessment of one's behavior and thoughts through personal inventory, and the prompt admission of wrongs. The idea is to constantly strive to do the right thing, keeping one's side of the street clean and not letting ethical quandaries pile up, and by doing so stay in a condition where one continues to have access to their higher power. Step Eleven calls for prayer and meditation, seeking only "knowledge of God's will [ ]...and the power to carry that out." (59) Step

Twelve calls for carrying the message of the spiritual awakening to other sufferers and the practice of the spiritual principles one has learned through working the steps. (60)

But there is more work to be done before these maintenance steps are reached. After completing the Fifth Step, either with one's sponsor or some other "close-mouthed" (74) individual, the practitioner is directed to go somewhere and sit quietly for an hour or so, examining the inventory that has just been revealed to see if anything has been left out. If something else is uncovered, the practitioner should tell someone at once. This is so that there are no nagging concerns which might serve to separate her from the connection she is establishing with her Higher Power.

The Big Book also offers this example of the importance of gratitude to the process of recovery: "...[C]arefully reviewing what we have done...[w]e thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better." (75) The Fifth Step promises have just been enumerated at this point:

Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye, We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall

from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe. (75)

Many practitioners report a similar experience, but many others are underwhelmed and report that they didn't feel any such transformational shift, at least not immediately. But almost all those who do a Fifth Step do relate that they come to feel more invested in their sobriety as a result of the inventory process.

Following the Fifth Step, the next instructions are to review all those items identified in the inventory as problematic and become willing to have the Higher Power remove them. This is Step 6, in which the practitioner, having completed the previous five steps, finds himself "...entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." (59, 76) In this step is also found the suggestion to ask one's Higher Power for the willingness to have those defects removed if the requisite readiness is not yet available.

Asking for the willingness is actually a part of the next step, Seven, which calls for humility and the direct request to one's Higher Power to have their defects of

character removed: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen." (76) These two steps, 6 and 7, are regarded as the 'easiest' steps to work, as they take little effort other than the review of defects compiled in Step 4 and the suggested 7th Step prayer. The notion underlying these two steps is that the practitioner, as part of the process of surrendering one's will and life to the care of a Higher Power (a commitment formally declared in Step 3), no longer is in the position of deciding which character traits are useful and which are not. The realization has been made that one's alcoholic mind is unsuitable for such decision making, and so the decisions are now left up to another part of the practitioner's psyche, namely, the unsuspected inner resource or Higher Power. The grosser practices, of course, those that are clearly harmful, should probably be curtailed, but the point really is about surrendering one's idea of how any given situation must unfold so that one can make room for the good that is available and manifesting itself to be actualized.

The next two steps, Eight and Nine, are known as the 'amends' steps, because it is at this point that the practitioner takes the information gleaned from the inventory and puts it to work to make restitution for harm done over the years. An alcoholic or addict has usually harmed a good number of people with the behavior exhibited during his active period. Step Eight first instructs to "...[m]a[k]e a list of all persons we had harmed and bec[o]me willing to make amends to them all." (59) This step begins the completion of the process started with the admission of powerlessness in Step One and continuing through the 'action' steps, Four through Nine. In Step Eight the practitioner uses the information uncovered in the inventory process and uses it to construct a plan for setting right those wrongs. At this point some practitioners may feel a bit of trepidation, perhaps even terror, at the prospect of facing those persons who they had treated so poorly in the past. A good sponsor will reassure them that at this point they need not be afraid, as the Eighth Step does not actually require this action. The actual amends take place in the Ninth Step: "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." (*ibid.*) For the time

being, while still on Step Eight, all that is required is the construction of the list and the willingness to make the amends. A deeper inquiry with a knowledgeable sponsor reveals a system for making this happen; the list can be broken down into three categories: a) amends that one is willing to make immediately, b) amends that one is not yet ready to make, but willing to consider making at some point in the future, and c) amends one is not willing to make. The practitioner goes over the list with the sponsor, and together they craft a strategy for making the amends, perhaps starting with an easier one, and in the meantime praying for the willingness to make the necessary amends. Most participants in the Twelve Step process see the Ninth Step as an open step, one that will be addressed on some level, (direct amends, living amends<sup>§</sup>, etc.) for the rest of one's life.

The Ninth Step may be the most crucial step in the process, as it facilitates the restoration, or, in some

---

<sup>§</sup> There is some contention about whether living amends are valid, because the text doesn't actually mention anything but direct amends. Some people feel that it is important to change one's behavior and make restitution even if the offended party is not available because of death or because the offender can't remember who they harmed.



cases, the beginning of, right relationships with one's fellow human beings. Because of the nature of human interactions, it is often those with whom one is closest that the most difficult amends need to be made. Many alcoholics and other Twelve Step participants have reported that they were able to set right wrongs that they believed were impossible to offset. The Big Book explicitly notes the promises that come along with the Ninth Step:

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half-way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves...Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us-sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them. (83-84)

The amends process, as is the case for all the twelve steps, involves surrendering one's ideas of how things must be so that new possibilities (a Higher Power "...doing for us what we could not do for ourselves...") can come to fruition.

The restorative power of the amends is attested to by participants: "Are these promises real? I have to admit they sounded pretty extravagant to me the first time I heard them. These things have come true for me in a way that seems completely natural. All I had to do was follow the steps." (Chris H., as quoted in *Steps Foundation Promises Page on line forum*, June 19, 2013, "Are These Promises Real?", <http://www.stepsfoundation/Promises.htm#>.)

The real proof is in the bone fide evidence that human beings who once were absolute slaves to their compulsion are able to function in the world free of that compulsion, and this freedom is connected, in their minds at least, to working the steps. As the recovery process continues, participants are enabled, through the ongoing process of Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, also known as the Maintenance Steps, to continue their spiritual growth on a daily basis. "As we work the first nine Steps, we prepare ourselves for the adventure of a new life. But when we approach Step Ten we commence to put our A.A. way of living to practical use, day by day, in fair weather or foul. Then comes the acid test: can we stay sober, keep in emotional balance and live to good purpose under all conditions?" (A.A. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 88) Step Ten,

which states that the participants "...continued to take personal inventory and when...[ ] wrong promptly admitted it," (Big Book, 59) is a systematic daily examination of one's ethical and spiritual condition, fashioned more or less, depending on the practitioner, after the Fourth Step inventory. One's sponsor or spiritual adviser will probably be the deciding factor on the exact form the Tenth Step will take. One somewhat common form that I came across in my research was the 'letter to God.' I first learned of it in a happenstance sort of way, when I ran into an acquaintance from the rooms on the street one day in 1996 or 1997. We were talking about our recovery and I expressed some concern about doing the Tenth Step properly, and he shared this format with me, which I subsequently used and passed on to others. I have also seen it being used by others in both AA and other Twelve Step programs. As far as I can tell, this 'letter to God' is public domain and has never been formally adapted by AA World Services, the publishing arm of Alcoholics Anonymous. The format is helpful, and I present it here:

"Hi Father, I have this problem and I can't handle it alone. The problem seems to be \_\_\_\_\_."

(Fill in the blank with any resentments, ill feelings, fears, shame, etc.; any negative feelings that cause a temporary separation from one's Higher Power.) At this point the Tenth Step inventory, as embodied in the 'letter to God' format, basically follows the structure of the Fourth Step inventory, but in prose form rather than by the formal columns. Thus the next step in this particular variety of Tenth Step inventory is to list all reasons, or causes, of the problem. Then one lists all the areas of one's life that this ill-feeling is affecting, a la the third column of the Fourth Step inventory. Finally, the practitioner assesses their own part in the situation, as is done in the fourth column of the Fourth Step inventory. This assessment of one's own part is again the key to finding a solution, which is ultimately a reconnection with one's Higher Power through the removal of those obstacles that clog the passage on a daily basis. When these procedures have been completed, the practitioner is directed to call a sponsor or some other trusted friend and read the inventory to them. This person may provide feedback from their own experience, but sometimes merely doing the inventory and promptly admitting one's wrongs is sufficient to clear the way for an intuitive thought about how to deal with the

situation. Finally, one says the Seventh Step Prayer and proceeds with any indicated action needed to amend the situation. Basically the Tenth Step is an encapsulation of Steps Four through Nine, and the actions taken are often referred to in the rooms as 'keeping one's side of the street clean.'

There are other ways to do the Tenth Step, including the spot-check inventory (*Anonymous 90*), which can be done at any given moment when one is feeling upset or angry or fearful; an inventory at the end of the day, to look at one's spiritual condition and assess whether one is making progress or regressing toward a relapse. There are also periodic inventories that some carry out on a regular basis, basically updates of the original Fourth Step. The important point is that the practitioner "...continues to take personal inventory, and when ...wrong promptly admit[s] it." (*Anonymous 59*)

The Eleventh Step, in which the practitioner "...[seeks] through prayer and meditation to improve [his/her] conscious contact with God as we understood [God], praying only for knowledge of [God's] will...and the power to carry that out" is, like the Tenth Step, suggested as a daily practice. Some do it more than once a day. The Big Book

"suggests prayer and meditation." (85) The meditation instructions begin with a guideline for "when we retire at night" (86) and closely resemble the Tenth Step instructions at that point, in that they call for a serious "review [of the] day," (*ibid.*) with a series of questions designed to uncover resentment, selfishness, dishonesty, and fear wherever these may have manifested. "Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?" (*ibid.*) These questions are useful in uncovering both the negative and positive aspects of the practitioner's day, in order to clear away anything which blocks a person from their vital connection to their Higher Power, but also to see where one is doing the right thing as well. The text cautions against "...drifting into worry, remorse, or morbid reflection," (*ibid.*) as that would only serve to "...diminish one's usefulness to others." (*ibid.*) The emphasis on usefulness to others is a recurring theme running throughout the narrative of the Big Book, as it is recognized that thinking of others is the antidote to a

deadly disease that is characterized most profoundly by selfishness and self-obsession. This portion of the instructions on meditation concludes with the suggestion to "ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken." (86) It is remarkable how closely this portion of the instructions resemble the suggestions for Step Ten (although the author of the Big Book either does not notice this or chooses not to mention it.)

The second portion of the Big Book instructions for Step Eleven then address morning meditation. "On awakening...(86) [it is suggested to] "...think about the twenty-four hours ahead...[and to] consider [one's] plans for the day." There is contrary action suggested beyond this point, that being to ask one's Higher Power or God of their understanding, "...to direct [one's] thinking, that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonesty, and self-seeking motives." (86) This suggestion is a radical one for the typical practitioner, as he/she is usually engaged in trying to figure out how things should go on his own. The instructions continue with the promise that with this approach, guided by one's Higher Power, "...our mental faculties [can be used] with assurance when...thinking is cleared of wrong motives." (86) Next are instructions for

how to deal with indecision, which seems to be a constant problem for someone suffering from a disease such as alcoholism. In the author's case, this was quite a difficulty in the beginning of his recovery, and it is still problematic at times, although there has been much improvement in this area, thanks primarily to these helpful words: "...Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for awhile." (86) To be able to cease engaging in frenetic, impulsive action, take a breath, and pray for the right thought or action, and then be able to get quiet and listen for guidance, are invaluable tools for those in recovery who have shared their experience with this step. Another promise is mentioned in the text, this one asserting that one will come to rely on intuition in a way that was not possible when actively engaged in addictive thought and behavior. But as a result of the Twelve Step process, these same individuals, who once lurched from one chaotic situation to another, frantically attempting to make sense of an increasingly senseless existence, are now able to use mind



and body with assurance, through this reliance upon prayer and meditation.

The recommendation then follows to "conclude the period of meditation with a prayer...[asking to] be shown all throughout the day what [one's] next step is to be," (86) the idea being that one thus receives guidance as to how to respond to any situation that arises. There is the specific remonstrance as well that this prayer include a request "for freedom from self-will," (87) and finally, for the ability to "...pause...throughout the day, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action." (87)

Essentially this step seems to be about improving the connection with a source of peace and serenity that again is claimed to be within oneself, but which, in the alcoholic, has been obscured by "...calamity, pomp, and worship of other things." (52) This idea is quite similar to the rationale given by most religions for prayer and meditation; these instructions appear in similar form in Eastern thought and in the mystical traditions of the West as well. The eleventh step is based on the premise that a loving higher power within seeks to bring balance, meaning, and happiness to the practitioner; in effect, this notion of the indwelling power that only wants what is best for

each person can be said to be the overriding premise of the entire Twelve-Step model. Whether one believes in a formal deity or not is beside the point; that one makes a conscious contact with that power is essential. Prayer and meditation is also a process that can be improved upon by daily practice. Many Twelve-Steppers have related how their circumstances took a turn for the worse when they neglected this step, and others have relayed the message that, because of this step they have been able to deal with problems that seemed beyond their ability to deal with, all as a result of 'working' the Eleventh Step. Of course, those who practice this step also will insist that their efforts at prayer and meditation were successful primarily as a result of the previous work done in the earlier steps, that of clearing out those things in their nature which blocked this contact in the first place through inventory and the making of amends. Another benefit of this step, according to practitioners, is that prayer and meditation becomes a safeguard against slipping into complacency, into believing that one is staying sober on their own power. Relapsers who are fortunate to make it back into the rooms list neglect of this step, along with falling off from

attendance at meetings, as leading causes of their loss of sobriety.

The Twelfth Step is in one sense the culmination of the recovery process: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry the message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs." (60) In another sense, however, it can be viewed simultaneously as both a culmination and a new beginning of a life-long experience. Now spiritually awakened to the truth about one's nature and relationship to a higher power of one's understanding, the practitioner is ready for a whole new stage in life, one that is increasingly satisfying as each new experience as a sober human being unfolds. If asked what the Twelfth Step means, many practitioners will of course respond with "...carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers." But there is also the understanding that Twelfth Step work can be conducted in other manners, equally effective when done in the spirit of service and self-forgetting. Some of these other, absolutely mutually inclusive, approaches to Twelve Step work might entail work that is vital to the Fellowship, or group. These other forms of service consist of everything from setting up meeting chairs, arriving

early to make sure the all-important coffee is ready by the time members start to arrive, greeting attendees as they arrive, sometimes for their very first meeting, and so on. There are also opportunities to volunteer one's help answering phones at the local Central Office -(basically a clearinghouse for information and literature which can be found in most larger and some smaller communities in the more established twelve-step programs)- as well as other activities and services provided, all of which are geared towards the 'primary purpose' of staying sober or abstinent and helping others to achieve their own recovery. Opportunities for service at this level also include receiving forwarded calls from a Central Office on one's home or cell phone, sometimes merely to just listen to the caller's concerns about their disease, and offering, rather than advice per se, one's own experience, strength, and hope regarding the possibility of recovery.

Additional opportunities for twelve-step work at meetings include the purchasing of supplies (coffee, cups, sugar, sweetener, creamer, spoons, etc.) for which one is usually reimbursed by the group secretary (another service position); providing cake for the celebration of sobriety birthdays or anniversaries (the nomenclature varies

depending on the group, but in the meetings that I observed the tendency was to refer to them as birthdays); cleaning the room and the coffee pots after meetings; all of these activities can be considered twelve-step work, as can be simply showing up to a meeting so that other seekers of recovery have someone to participate in their recovery with. Occasionally one hears of experiences where a meeting which was supposed to be taking place has fallen off the map, so to speak, but this seems to be a pretty rare occurrence. In my observation, most of the time the meetings are very well-attended.

The newcomer to any recovery program is especially important, for the simple reason that without being of service to another person, recovering sufferers are left thinking about themselves, which is of course the underlying problem as identified in the literature of the original group, Alcoholics Anonymous: "Our very lives as ex-problem drinkers depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs." (20) This statement is unambiguous. For those who are in recovery it is absolutely vital that the Twelfth Step be practiced on as constant a basis as possible. Of course, taking a newcomer through the Steps as outlined in the Big Book is a

key element of Twelve-Step work: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as extensive work with other alcoholics. It works where other activities fail." (89) As the process of taking a newcomer unfolds, the transformation, for the newcomer of course, but also for the 'old timer' who is offering his help, can be very dramatic. For the newcomer, there is a sense of power, calmness, relief from compulsion and obsession, and an inner sense of peace that hasn't been felt in a long time. For the old timer, (and by old timer we mean to say anyone who has worked the steps themselves and can take someone through them) taking someone through the steps is not just a revisiting of the original process, but, as many have testified, a completely new experience, one that benefits both parties. This is due to the dynamic nature of the participants, who draw upon each other in a spirit of mutuality and interdependence, for the resulting awakening that one gets from the Twelve-Step process includes the realization that there can be no real separation, that all are one.

From this point on, working together as sponsor and sponsoree, the participants are able to recognize these truths and build off this knowledge a new foundation for

living life. This foundation is the awareness that all reality is a part of this loving higher power, that there is no error in the way life has unfolded, that everything that has taken place so far is a necessary element in bringing the participant to this moment of freedom and awakening. Now it is up to the newcomer to continue, as it remains for the sponsor, to stay in recovery and carry this powerful message of liberation to someone else, and in doing so, continue also to receive this gift of freedom from compulsion and obsession on a daily basis.

While researching the Twelve-Step model I have also found it useful to work these steps for my own issues surrounding obsessive and compulsive behaviors, and, as a result, I have been empowered to to avoid acting out on my primary addiction and some secondary manifestations as well. Many who come to recovery, and I include myself in their number, have some unrealistic expectations , perhaps based on their own grandiose thinking (as well as some well-worn cultural attitudes regarding addiction and alcoholism), that cessation of this compulsive/obsessive behavior should mean the end of all difficulties in life, that abstinence itself is a panacea. Although there are occasionally such stories of lives immediately transformed,

these are exceptions to the rule. What most who come into recovery and earnestly work the steps get is the opportunity to live life on life's terms without the necessity to escape reality by abusing a substance or a process. Many, including this author, experience ongoing difficulties, especially in the area of relationships, but in other arenas as well. Recovering people are no exception to the rule. Everyone has to struggle at some point in life. However, most of these difficulties can be faced with at least a modicum of cheerfulness with the help of one's fellowship, whether it be by sharing about the difficulty at a meeting, and by so doing, bearing witness to a newcomer that they don't have to succumb to active addiction no matter what, or by having a chat with one's sponsor, writing inventory about the particular trouble one is going through, making amends for any related wrongs done, praying, meditating, and basically being of use to another rather than dwelling on one's own situation.

Any combination of the above can work, and has worked for a good number of human beings who were once doomed to wallow in self-pity and attempt to drown out the awareness of their miserable condition with a substance or process. And of course, some find it necessary to seek help from



others outside the Twelve-Step fellowship, particularly in the form of therapy and/or guidance from a religious person. There are also various gradients of success in terms of recovery: some in recovery have maintained their abstinence from the abused substance or process from day one of entering into a Twelve-Step program; most, though, experience at least one relapse of differing duration, some more than one. Those who survive and continue on the path of recovery find that their lives are indeed transformed. Life becomes simpler most of the time, as it is now lived in the present rather than in the shameful past or dreaded future. The disease of alcoholism is said to be a disease of time; the sufferer is always thinking either with regret about the past or with fear of the future. In recovery, "having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps..." (60), this same person comes to see that life is only truly lived in the moment, and in that moment discovers the 'unsuspected inner resource' that is needed to deal with whatever is occurring in the present.

Humans are cultural beings. They create connections with each other and expand them into groups and organizations and societal structures, based on their individual contributions, which are in turn based on their

experiences with life. How then do the experiences of people in recovery affect the culture at large? Such an awakening to the knowledge that one has everything needed to live in the moment, and will more than likely, based on a clear view of past experiences, continue to do so, can and may already be having a transformative effect upon the ongoing construction of society and culture. People become less afraid of the future and are thus not driven to guarantee their security by sacrificing present moments to gain excessive amounts of money, property, and recognition, all elements of what is usually considered a secure construct in the current culture. What is taking place in the lives of those who engage in Twelve-Step recovery is, over time, a cognitive restructuring by which is meant that the recovering person experiences a new way of thinking which strongly relies upon the inner resource that the steps have given access to. New thinking brings about new actions, and as human beings are wont to do, these new actions lead them to new ways of associating with their fellows, marked by an attitude of mutuality, interdependence, and shared altruism. Those who have worked the steps and have stayed in recovery, continuing to be of service to newcomers, have experienced a gradual yet

phenomenal change in their identity, from a scared, selfish, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually ill person, unable to control their compulsion/obsession, to a person who has the power to live life meaningfully, no longer bound by the self as they were in the addictive phase of their existence.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Not all my fellow practitioners believe in this transformational capacity of the TSRM as it applies to anything beyond the personal; still fewer believe in the necessity for such a role to be played by what they see as a simple tool for achieving and maintaining one's sobriety. Having stated such, I still believe, based on my observations these last several years, that such a transformation is taking place, albeit in a subtle, nuanced fashion. Society in general seems more open in many ways, and people in general are more willing to articulate how they feel. There is more willingness in the comfortable to speak out when they perceive injustice being done to those less fortunate. One of the key observations that came out of my research was that people who drank or used drugs had a deep sense of injustice, and saw much inequality in their world, most of it directed toward themselves, of course, in their selfish worldview. This sense of injustice, contributing to the stress that alcoholics and addicts seek to treat by ingesting alcohol and substances, remains to a certain extent when they enter into recovery, and many have related their struggles in sobriety to this ongoing sense that injustice remains within the structures of society.

What comes across overridingly from this examination of the TSRM more than anything is that there is hope. There is a solution to the problem of alcoholism/addiction, and this solution, which involves admitting to one's innermost self what the problem is, honestly facing up to those factors-resentment, fear, and shame- that stand in the way of connection with the vital core of one's true self, setting right the wrongs committed along the way, and attempting to carry the message of this hope to fellow sufferers, has been working now for over 79 years. During this period, American society and Western culture in general have a mixed record in terms of the level of selfishness that has been exhibited. On the one hand, there are many examples of altruism and concern for one's fellow human beings, while at the same time we are faced with a level of consumption and selfishness that is arguably putting the species at risk of annihilation and clearly is causing a great deal of harm to those in the world who find themselves on the wrong side of the have/have not divide. Yet in the TSRM is the potential for a solution to this selfishness, a solution that becomes more viable just as the condition of the species becomes more desperate. Desperation, in fact, seems to be the necessary ingredient

for the willingness it takes to implement a Twelve Step Recovery program.

This dissertation has set out to systematically present the development of the TSRM from its antecedents in religious culture, mainly first century Christianity and more modern day temperance movements, through to the 19th century example of the Washingtonians (an earlier attempt at solving the problem of alcoholism by using spiritual principles) and the more directly influential Oxford Group movement of the early 20th century. Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, were both Oxford Group members who then developed the first Twelve Step program. In a more detailed manner I have presented a history of the birth of Alcoholics Anonymous and thus the TSRM, pointing to the contextual backdrop of the Great Depression culture. In doing so I highlighted key aspects of alcoholism and addiction, as responses to crises which act as stressors on the individual. These stressors actually produce chemicals in the brain which cause depression and anxiety. Alcohol and drugs are particularly suited to treating such stressors, at least in the short term. This confluence of factors, stress, availability of substances, and a culture which promotes the aptitude for

conceiving of solutions to seemingly insoluble problems, combined with the historical good fortune of the meeting of these two alcoholics is arguably more possible in the American context in which Alcoholics Anonymous developed. On the one hand there is the stressful lifestyle of achievement, acquisition, and consumption which the culture promotes as a path to success, and on the other an atmosphere of openness to new solutions, and a spirit of willingness to take desperate measures when they are called for. In any case, this was the situation that gave birth to the movement that has been so influential in saving and redeeming the lives of countless alcoholics, addicts and other human beings who found their solution in the Twelve Steps.

Having established a basis for the argued hypothesis, namely that the TSRM functions not just as a good program for getting alcoholics and addicts clean and sober, but that it additionally is having a transformative effect on American capitalist culture, this dissertation turned to addressing some specific questions surrounding that claim. What does the growing incidence of twelve step movements for treating addictive and obsessive-compulsive behaviors reflect about the overall condition and efficacy of the

American capitalist culture? How does this recovery model impact the dominant culture's ability to maintain control over its constituents? How are choices rooted in societal constructs being affected by the increasing necessity of those in recovery to act unselfishly and altruistically in order to remain free of the oppression of addiction? Might continued participation in twelve step recovery lead to large scale societal transformation?

The TSRM began as a technology by which alcoholics sought to escape the trap they found themselves in, which outwardly manifested as enslavement to alcohol. However, as Bernard Smith, non-alcoholic chairman of the General Service Board, is quoted as stating in the introduction to this work alcohol itself was "an escape from personal enslavement to the false ideas of a materialistic society." What has been argued here is that the TSRM has the capacity for transforming this materialistic society and its false ideas through the process of ethical self-examination and restitution for wrongs done that is required for the individual to recover. Can the same approach that has worked to positively impact the lives of millions of sufferers work on the collective scale? Yes it can. What is needed is a TSRM for the United States of America, and for



its global corporate capitalist partners. The spiritual awakening made possible by the Twelve Steps is basically the recognition of one's self in the other, in the object of its belief. It is an awakening to the awareness that there is something beyond oneself that matters. It is the reconciliation of the alcoholic from its position of atheism, its belief that there is no power greater than itself. This belief that there is no power greater than itself leads the alcoholic to try to control everything in its world. Bill Wilson recognized this aspect of the alcoholic personality when he wrote that "the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so." (Anonymous, 62) It is this very characteristic of the alcoholic, the self-will out of control, having no higher authority (while all the time professing allegiance to one) that can be observed in the American triumphalist exceptionalism as it has prevailed upon the rest of the world in the last century or so. And just like the alcoholic, America has begun to do a great deal of damage to its fellows. It needs an intervention, one in which it can be shown that if it ever did run the whole show, it can no longer maintain such a position of

hegemony. A new relationship, one based on mutuality, must be established.

"[T]he experience of mutuality is the foundation of the very existence of Alcoholics Anonymous." (Kurtz 1992) Kurtz tells the story of how the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, found himself in a hotel lobby in Akron, Ohio, in 1935, after about 5 months of sobriety. Wilson had just felt the old urge to drink return, after having experienced a failed business meeting he had hoped would provide him with some financial security in his new sober state. The old fears and sense of inadequacy had returned, triggering the craving for alcohol. As he paced the hotel lobby, listening to the murmurings of the customers and the clink of ice on glass, he started toying with the idea of taking a drink. This thought caused him to feel fear, because he had managed to stay sober for nearly six months, and now it seemed to make sense, in his mind, to take a drink and ease the sense of disturbance he was feeling. Then Wilson remembered what had been helping him to stay sober over those months: his attempts to help other drunks to get sober. He was inspired to call a number listed on the church directory in the lobby, looking for a drunk he could talk to, in hopes that this would relieve

him of the obsession to drink. After calling a few numbers, he was able to talk to one Henrietta Sieberling, a member of the local Oxford Group, who then arranged for Wilson to meet with one of her fellow Oxforders, local physician Dr. Bob Smith, who fit the category of drunk quite well. The meeting was set for the next evening, which was a Sunday. The story goes that Dr. Bob agreed to a 15 minute meeting, no longer, because he had been told that he would be helping Wilson to stay sober. The two men ended up talking for several hours, and this encounter led to the establishment of Alcoholics Anonymous and several hundred other twelve step fellowships that still exist today.

Dr. Bob (as he is commonly referred to in AA lore) had initially joined the Oxford Group in Akron, hoping to find a solution to his drinking and drugging problems. Bill W. had been introduced to the New York chapter of the Oxford Group earlier in 1934 by his friend Ebby Thacher. Dr. Bob had been unable to stay sober at all, but when he heard from Bill W. on this Sunday evening in May 1935 that the key to Bill's own ability to abstain from alcohol was in the attempt to help other alcoholics get sober, this made sense to the doctor, and he felt that it would be impolite not to accommodate his new acquaintance and grant him this

opportunity to enhance his own sobriety, even as he sensed that this message would do nothing to still his own cravings. For his part, Wilson had approached his earlier cases from the standpoint that he was doing them a favor; it was only in this case, where he realized that his very life depended upon his seeking to help another alcoholic, and that he needed the alcoholic even more than the alcoholic needed him, that the truth of his condition and the solution for it became clear. Realization of this paradoxical condition has become a pillar of the belief system that developed out of this original encounter, the belief system that is the framework of Alcoholics Anonymous and twelve step movements in general.

These experiences of telling one's story and listening to another's story, as Wilson and Smith discovered, are transformational in themselves. As we have seen in Chapter 5, the format of one alcoholic sharing their experience, strength, and hope, whether in a speaker meeting, participation meeting, or simply face to face with another alcoholic has a direct effect on the experience itself. It is a validation that the experience matters. When an alcoholic first comes to the rooms of recovery, he or she feels isolated and ashamed, believing no one else could

possibly understand or accept what he has experienced in his alcoholism, the degradation of the drunk man or woman, the addict who must go to any length to maintain the substance she craves. But then, something remarkable takes place for that same newcomer when, sitting in a meeting or over a cup of coffee he hears other people telling stories similar to his own, and learns that he is not alone in what he has experienced. As this knowledge sinks in, the alcoholic begins to feel less alone, alienated from others and ashamed of his own existence. The newly recovering alcoholic starts to gain the courage to share some of her own experience, and as she does so, she hears from others that the experience she has related resonates with their own experiences, and so this experience takes on a new shading. From a dark and solitary place, these experiences begin to take on a lighter aspect as one sees in them commonality with other experiences. The alcoholic even finds himself able to laugh, at first just a bit, but later maybe quite a lot, at his own experiences, especially as he begins to realize that he has survived these experiences and now can be helpful to another who follows him into recovery with a similar experience. In this process the recovering person discovers that these experiences are

actually gifts of a sort, because they have led to this capacity to be of use to another fellow sufferer, and in this capacity the alcoholic finds deliverance from his own addiction. This point is corroborated by the story of Bill W. seeking to share his own experience with another drunk, Dr. Bob, so that he himself could stay sober. Bill shared his own experience with a fellow alcoholic, one who was still in the throes of his addiction, and was able to maintain his own sobriety. By abandoning oneself to the process of recovery, he achieves release from those addictive substances and processes that block access to that Higher Power that is the essence of his being. This is the underlying basis of twelve step recovery. This abandoning of one's attempts to control the outcome of events runs counter to the Western, American Triumphantist ethos of rugged individualism and self-seeking.

I wrote this dissertation as an exercise in exploring the working hypothesis that the TSRM is uniquely suited to treat the underlying cause of alcoholism as viewed by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous: Selfishness. What I have attempted to offer is a possible prescription, an antidote, to the rampant consumerism that seems to be taking hold of American society and which acts as the manifestation of the

addictive nature found in those who have turned to the Twelve Steps for a solution. My focus on the Twelve Steps stems from my own experience with recovery, and with my observations over the years, in which I have seen an analog between individual selfishness as embodied in the addict, and corporate selfishness as embodied in the pursuit of the American dream of plenty at the expense of much of the rest of the world. It would seem that if the Twelve Steps can work as well as they do on the individual addict or alcoholic whose underlying problem is selfishness and self-centered fear, that these same principles of ethical self-assessment (Step 4), disclosure of one's wrongdoings and defects of character (Steps 5 and 6), and the subsequent amending of these wrongs (Steps 8 and 9), can work for larger assortments of individuals, i.e., collectively in the forms of corporations and states, as these people begin to feel the effects of their own compulsive pursuits upon the rest of the world.

As I asserted in my introductory comments, the Twelve Step Recovery Model serves as an avenue to freedom, an ethical path to liberation, not only for alcoholics and addicts, but for an increasing number of their fellow human beings who find themselves beset with their own forms of

addiction and compulsion, and those who do not have a pronounced illness or behavior but still find themselves alienated from themselves and others due to the underlying malady of selfishness. To date, there are said to be at least 200 groups which have been given permission by Alcoholics Anonymous, the original Twelve Step group, to use the steps as their guidelines for recovery. A key element of the model, ethical self-assessment as embodied in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> step inventory process, is pivotal in creating the potential for a re-examination and re-evaluation of old patterns of thought and actions which are responsible for obsessive/compulsive behaviors and the discarding of these behaviors. The process then continues with the amends steps, 6 through 9, which enable the adaptation of new, healthier ways of being, transforming individuals and their cultures from selfish and materialistic to altruistic and spiritual.

It is the participation in one's own dominance that is the essence of the problem. Human beings are self-centered by nature. "Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles."(Anonymous, 62) As humans develop socially, they make decisions based on their own self-interests, and these choices can lead to consequences



which are not always intended or pleasant. Finding themselves in conflict with others who have competing interests, humans have constructed societies largely in an attempt to reduce and otherwise ameliorate the effects of such conflicts on all parties concerned. So it is not only alcoholics and addicts who are selfish and self-seeking, but their behaviors were much more noticeable, fueled as they were by the consumption of alcohol and/or other substances, and so these individuals were the first ones identified as problematic. Such individuals were often at odds with this societal goal of eliminating or limiting conflict. But selfishness itself can be quite a subtle quality, and it can manifest in many forms, some of them not so easily noticed and often quite mistaken for virtue. If the word 'alcoholic' were to be replaced by the words human being, would not the following ring just as truthfully?

...[A]ny life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis, we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make those

arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish, and dishonest. But, *as with most humans*, he is more likely to have varied traits. (*Anonymous, ibid.*)

In a very real sense, concerning the manner in which alcoholics and addicts process alcohol and other substances, they are indeed "bodily and mentally different from their fellows." (30) But in many other matters, such as the choices they make based on self-interest, these people are quite similar to their fellow human beings. Even a casual look at the history of humanity shows this to be so. How often have empires been constructed by formidable leaders who, while accomplishing great feats of conquest and consolidation, were almost always at odds with themselves and with some other individual or group? How much suffering, has been caused by human beings who were profoundly convinced of the righteousness of their actions, and how much more suffering caused by others who knew their actions were wrong but committed them anyway because they felt they had no choice? In this sense, one could argue that all human beings are subject to this core of selfishness that the alcoholic manifests so apparently.

This is why it can be argued that not only alcoholics and addicts, but all human beings, potentially, are in need of and can benefit from a way of living such as the Twelve Steps. But what is it about these steps, these ideas and concomitant actions, that makes them so effective? The answer seems to be that the steps are a path of ethical behavior which, if thoroughly practiced, can lead to 1) the acknowledgement of the futility of one's self-propelled, selfish approach to life; 2) the hope that a way can be found out of such futility; 3) the crucial development of the ability to critically assess one's slavery to selfishness through inventory; 4) the setting right of the wrongs committed along the way; 5) the freedom from guilt as a result of making these amends; 6) the continued fruitful connection to "the unsuspected inner resource" (567-8) which is recognized as the solution to own's bondage; and 7) a life lived relatively free from the self-constructed prison of selfishness and all the manifestations of self which keep one from living life fully. All of this is possible, as demonstrated by practitioners of the Steps.

This way of life, this ethic, seems well and good for those who suffer from the addictions, compulsions, and obsessive behaviors that are shown to be effectively

treated by the practice of the Twelve Steps, but why should others, especially those who are "thriving" in terms of worldly standards bother with such drastic measures? Why would supposedly successful people need the Twelve Steps?

Western civilization has been bedeviled by the myth of success, and the notion that one's good fortune is solely due to one's own efforts and has no connection to another's lack of fortune. Also besetting the culture are the effects of the acts of oppression on the oppressor, as Freire explains in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire shows us how oppression works to dehumanize both the oppressor and the oppressed (30). American culture in particular, constructed as it is on the myth of material success as the measuring stick for true fulfillment, has become dependent on this myth to perpetuate itself. This myth of the soteriological nature of material well-being provides the ongoing framework for a society based on consumption. A supportive element of this myth is the sub-myth of meritocracy, the notion that everyone in American culture has an equal opportunity to succeed materially, based on their own good behavior as citizens and participants in capitalism. These actions, so the myth holds, will lead ultimately to success and satisfaction. That this framework is represented in the

narrative of the Twelve Step model is no accident, as the program arose from the perspectives of American men, including the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, a New York stockbroker (Wilson) and an Akron proctologist (Smith). These were men who deeply embraced this ideology of material success, a framework that seemed to ignore other factors not having to do with meritorious actions, such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. But, whereas the American myth of success serves to mask these differences, practice of the steps, especially the inventory process, unmask these same differences, or more precisely, the attitudes towards these factors, that serve to oppress some human beings and keep them from thriving. In this unmasking the process of the steps seeks to counter the problematic tendency within recovery groups (which are, after all, comprised mostly of firm believers in the American myth), to see all troubles as arising solely from individual shortcomings, devoid of any institutional influence whatsoever. The Twelve Step process itself belies that claim, for working the steps diligently involves a close examination of one's resentments, fears, and shame-based memories of past actions, in order to recognize patterns of thought and

action and make adjustments for a future life to be lived free of their oppressive influence. Such a thorough process has to take an honest look at how one views oneself in relationship to others, and this critique of one's self must of necessity also address the attitudes instilled by society. As these attitudes are interrogated, long standing biases are uncovered and brought to the surface, providing for a clear look at the dominant worldview held prior to this undertaking. When this inventory process is done thoroughly, including the Fifth Step admission "to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs" (*Anonymous*, 59), usually with one's sponsor or another person experienced with this inventory process, there is the strong chance that whatever one's old operating language regarding this American myth of individualism and material success as of utmost importance will be challenged. What the Twelve Step model has going for it is that there will always be selfishness and self-interest in human beings, and these instincts will always be over-used; thus there will always be a need for a solution to this selfishness. A needed adjustment takes place as a result of the process, one that alleviates the suffering caused by selfishness, and one re-forms the way

they see and respond to the world in a manner that is more effective. This is how the Twelve Step model works, and it is strikingly similar to how religion in general works. The equation is problem balanced by a solution, whether it be a problem of this world such as alcoholism or selfishness in general. The process of the Twelve Steps liberates human beings to live lives free from the bondage of self. As Viktor Frankl, founder of logotherapy and a survivor of the Holocaust points out, writing of his experience in concentration camps, "...[E]verything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (Frankl, 104)

The TSRM offers a solution to the problem of self-centeredness through the medium of self-consciousness. Embodied in the inventory steps (4,5, and 10), this medium of self-consciousness empowers the practitioner to uncover their "...enabling historical conditions" (Eagleton, 91); in other words, the inventory process makes possible the direct acknowledgement and interrogation of the historical conditions that have been the basis for one's belief system to that point. How does this take place? By engaging in a historical narrative, the inventory-taker goes back through

their life, uncovering resentments, fears, and the events that are the source of one's guilt and shame. This process in turn makes possible the examination of old patterns of thinking and behaving, and most crucially, allows the practitioner to take responsibility for participating in those patterns of behavior. Then the text gives instructions as to how to proceed in the inventory, as this next part is the crucial element in the consciousness-enabling power of the TSRM:

We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it [the inventory] carefully. The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got [i.e., the third column]. The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore [remained resentful, and thus, in a state of captivity to selfishness]. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only seemed to win. Our moments of triumph were short lived.

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worthwhile. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die. (65)



(It is interesting and apropos to this last quotation to note that many alcoholics have shared in meetings that this insanity of drinking can both be a curse and a blessing, as it was only the threat of such a drastic outcome, death looming on the horizon, which impelled them to surrender their insistence on dealing with the situation themselves and to seek help from another. Unfortunately, for many alcoholics, even this threat of death is not enough to override the compulsion to drink, and they continue on the path to self-destruction.)

Returning to the text, we see a solution to this dilemma emerging:

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison.

We turned back to the list, for it held the key (emphasis mine) to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that this world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

This was our course. We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. [This realization of the human connection and interrelatedness is a key factor in the proliferation

of the application of the TSRM to many other issues besides alcoholism.] We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves 'This is a sick [person]. How can I be helpful...? God save me from being angry. Thy will not mine be done.'" (67)

(The last sentences of this lengthy quote, the quote within the quote, are referred to by members as 'The Fourth Step Prayer.')

People in recovery engage in these practices of inventory and prayer because their experience as active as well as recovering alcoholics shows that such resentments are indeed very grave, and can be life-threatening. They realize that in the past they have involved themselves in many forms of self-abuse in order to avoid having to deal directly with such resentments. Human beings are prone to such feelings because they are sentient creatures, which experience sensations and emotions that then stimulate the thought process. Thinking involves memory, and these memories present themselves in the painful form of resentment. When these resentments are embraced, the alcoholic is "shut ... off from the sunlight of the Spirit." (66) In the case of alcoholics, when this flow of light, this sense of resentment-free love of oneself and others, through connection with a higher power gets cut off,

clogged by obsessive re-sensing of past injuries, life becomes very dark, and the only way out seems to be through resorting to substance abuse or some other addictive process.

So this returns us to the solution as offered in the Fourth Step inventory. After all resentments are listed and all causes and effects are examined, then this crucial element of naming one's own participation in the process must be completed if the sufferer is to have any chance at freedom from these resentments. Somewhat separate yet interrelated inventories are also conducted, looking specifically at a)one's fears, and b)one's past relationships, to see where wrongs can be set right in the amends process (steps 8 and 9), and to "shape a sane and sound ideal for our future [relationships].(69)

The inventory process is thus a method for historically interrogating one's life in depth, unpacking thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in order to expose underlying operating principles which have contributed to the lonely isolated prison that is the sufferer's existence. The gift of the inventory is in its power to reveal the true identity of the jailer.

Yet does this inventory process go far enough? Certainly it has been demonstrated that the ultimate problem, and the ultimate solution, resides in the individual's realization of their participation in their own captivity; but does this automatically absolve other individuals or institutions of any complicity in the domination of others? Know the truth for oneself is absolutely imperative, but are there no conditions under which a person or a group might truly see themselves as blameless, and others at fault? There may be no simple answer to this question, but neither does this preclude the inventory process from being used in situations that transcend individual agency. There are phenomenon within the recovery milieu such as the group inventory. Such phenomenon consist of the same elements as in the individual inventory, only scaled to fit a larger context. Usually this means an interrogation, formal or informal, of the group, particularly regarding the question as to whether it is following the guidelines outlined in the "Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous" (562, and presented in the short form in an appendix to these pages). Bill W., co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, cautioned

against trying to do too much in the world with the resources that A.A. has to offer:

Our Society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose: the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody.- (*Alcoholics Anonymous World Services*, 231)

Does this mean that there is no useful application of the twelve step process to other, larger issues? Not at all, for experience has shown, even for those in recovery, that even as the craving for a particular substance or activity goes away, a "...familiar inner thirst remains." (Grof, 138) As for non-alcoholics, and non-addicts, who are not subject to such out of control compulsions, there is still a level of experience that is universally shared by human beings. This experience is well-articulated in the Four Noble Truths expressed by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, as he achieved enlightenment under the Bodhi tree: 1) Life is suffering; 2) this suffering is caused by attachment or craving; 3) to avoid such suffering one must let go of attachment; and 4) this relief comes in the form of practicing the Noble Eight Fold Path. (In the same vein as the Twelve Steps, although much older in inception and usage, the Noble Eight-fold Path is a real-world guide to moral and intellectual growth with the objective of liberating

the individual from attachments and illusions. Practically speaking, the Twelve Steps are the Eight-fold Path for the Western mind. "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. (*Anonymous*, 58)

The Eight-fold Path consists of three subdivisions. The first two paths, Right View and Right Intention, lead to Wisdom. The next three paths, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood lead to Ethical Conduct. The third and final group, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, lead to Mental Development. These paths are interconnected, rather than sequential, which seems major difference in comparison to the Twelve Steps when examined in a cursory fashion. But when one probes deeper into what both the Twelve Steps and the Eight-fold Path are designed to accomplish, one sees that each is a system designed ultimately to achieve enlightenment, or "...a spiritual awakening as the result..." (90) of practicing either path, or both.

Thus it can be asserted that addiction/alcoholism is one specific form of attachment, but that all attachment causes suffering. If this is so, then the Twelve Steps, which are useful in alleviating the specific form of attachment that addiction/alcoholism represents, should be effective on other forms of attachment, as they are all, at root, related. And

what is the dynamic involved in this relationship? Empirical research is demonstrating the relationship between biological nature and the mistreatment of children during early childhood on the incidence of addiction in adulthood. (Flores, 214) Flores asserts that his results show how addictive behavior results from personal and societal upsets, or 'challenges', which actually affect brain development and thus affect one's emotions and psyche. Simply put, the way one is treated, from early infancy on, affects the brain and one's emotional development. (xii) "...[E]motional interpersonal bonds, seated in the brain as much as the mind, are the most important stuff of our ties to the caring and comforting parts of self and others. In their absence we become behaviorly and addictively disordered." (*ibid.*)

The notion that repressed peoples need a way to put their situation of oppression into a larger context, one that the oppressors can afford to ignore because it works to their advantage, is laid out by Georg Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*. (Lukacs, 90) This idea of the importance of clearly seeing one's situation is key to the self-assessment component of the Twelve Steps, the inventory steps 4 and 10 in particular. In order to maintain a position of dominance the oppressor must suppress interrogation of the process by which

such a condition of advantage came to be and is maintained. Taking inventory of, or assessing the process in question enables such positions of dominance to be de-naturalized and exposed for the constructs that they truly are. This denaturalization and exposition of the dominance can then be challenged, and a more equitable arrangement becomes possible.

My approach to examining the TSRM was through the lens of a religious system; AA and other twelve step groups fit the profile of religious groups in terms of the basic elements agreed upon by scholars: myth, ritual, ethics, community and focus on the sacred (a Higher Power and its granting of sobriety/recovery). Therefore, my conceptual framework is built upon the notion that the TSRM, like religions in general, is designed to address an existing problem. Just as religions offer a solution to an existing problem (Christianity-salvation through faith in the atonement of Jesus, Buddhism - escape from the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth), so do the Twelve Steps offer a treatment of the underlying cause of suffering, selfishness, and a solution to addiction and its consequences. As this theoretical framework is projected out into the world, the TSRM is seen as a viable solution not only to problems of



addiction caused by selfishness, but as a solution to the collective issues that plague the world. If selfishness is the underlying cause of suffering for the individual it only makes sense that this is so on the collective level. Thus, the TSRM can be applied to larger issues of selfishness: overconsumption of resources, war, poverty, famine, environmental degradation, etc. For those who would argue that these problems are insoluble, one can point to the miraculous results that practicing the Twelve Steps have had on increasing numbers of sufferers of addiction and other compulsions. If such altruism can be duplicated in just a few of the world's most powerful corporate and national leaders and within their organizations, the results could be amazing. Is such talk naïve, reflective of pie-in-the-sky religious narrative? It is difficult to negate such a claim outright, but there seems to be an even stronger argument that the diffusion of the TSRM offers hope to a world suffering from selfishness and its manifestations.

## **Bibliography**

Addenbrooke, Mary, *Survivors of Addiction, Narratives of Recovery*, London: Routledge, 2011.

Adorno, Theodor, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London: Routledge, 1991.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A. A.*, New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957.

Allan, John. "The Eightfold Path." *Buddhist Studies-Basic Buddhism*. Accessed January 30, 2015. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/8foldpath.htm>.

Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, New York: A.A. World Services, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. First Edition. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Twelve-steps and Twelve Traditions*, New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Pass It On: The story of Bill Wilson and how the A.A. message reached the world*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1984.

Bateson, Gregory. "The cybernetics of self: a theory of alcoholism." *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, New York: Ballantine, 1972.

Batstone, David ... [et al.], editors, *Liberation theologies, postmodernity, and the Americas*, London ; New York : Routledge, 1997.

Bell, Catherine, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bennett, Linda M., and Genevieve M. Ames, editors; *The American experience with alcohol : contrasting cultural perspectives*, New York : Plenum Press, 1985.

Bishop, Charles A., & Bill Pittman, *The annotated bibliography of Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939-1989*, Wheeling, W. Va. (46 Eureka Ave., Wheeling 26003) : Bishop of Books, 1989.

Bourdieu, Pierre, "La dissolution du religieux", *Chose Dites*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge, 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field", Trans. Jenny B. Burnside, Craig Calhoun and Leah Florence, *Comparative Social Research* 13: 1-44.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Sayad, A., *The Uprooting: The Crisis of Traditional Agriculture in Algeria*, Paris: Minuit, 1964.

\_\_\_\_\_, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Trans. Mathew Adamson, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990b.

Bourdieu, P., and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Brandes, Stanley, *Staying sober in Mexico City*, Austin : University of Texas Press, 2002.

Brown, Stephanie, and Virginia Lewis, *The alcoholic family in recovery : a developmental model*, New York : Guilford Press, 1999.

Calhoun, Craig. "'Religion's Many Powers, The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere.'" March 16, 2011. <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/03/16/religions-many-powers/> (accessed April 5, 2011).

Cheever, Susan, *My Name Is Bill: Bill Wilson--His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Clark, Walter Houston, *The Oxford group, its history and significance*, New York, Bookman Associates, 1951.

Cone, James H.; *God of the oppressed*, New York : Seabury Press, 1975.

Davis, Kenneth G., *Primerio Dios : Alcoholics Anonymous and the Hispanic community*, Selinsgrove, Pa. : Susquehanna University Press, 1994.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

De La Torre, Miguel A., editor, *The hope of liberation in world religions*, Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. Brian Massumi. London and New York: Continuum, 2004. Vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 2 vols. 1972-1980. Trans. of *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980.

Denzin, Norman K., *The alcoholic society : addiction and recovery of the self*, with a new introduction by the author and a foreword by John M. Johnson, New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A. : Transaction Publishers, 1993.

Diamond, Jonathan, PhD, *Narrative Means to Sober Ends: Treating Addiction and its Aftermath*, New York: The Guilford Press, 2000.

Driberg, Tom. *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament: A Study of Frank Buchman and His Movement*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.

Dupont, Robert, *The Selfish Brain: Learning from Addiction*, Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2000.

Eagleton, Terry, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso, 1991.

Fateux, Kevin, *The recovery of self : regression and redemption in religious experience*, New York, N.Y. : Paulist Press, 1994.

Flores, Philip J. *Addiction as an Attachment Disorder*. Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.

Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search for Meaning*, Simon and Schuster : New York, 1984.

Ford, Mark, "Elizabeth Bishop at the Water's Edge," *Essays in Criticism*, 53.3, (2003): 235-261. Print.

Fox, Michael Allen. *The Accessible Hegel*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2005.

Freud, Sigmund, *The future of an illusion*, translated by W.D. Robson-Scott ; revised and newly edited by James Strachey. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964.

Fromm, Erich, *Escape from Freedom*, New York: Holt, 1994.  
Gellman, Irving Peter, *The sober alcoholic; an organizational analysis of Alcoholics Anonymous*. New Haven, College and University Press, 1964.

Gramsci, Antonio, *Prison Notebooks*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992-2007.

Grof, C., *The Thirst For Wholeness: Attachment, Addiction, and the Spiritual Path*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993.

Hazelden Foundation, *The Twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous*, interpreted by the Hazelden Foundation, San Francisco : Harper/Hazelden, 1987.

Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Hegel, G.W.F., *Philosophie des Rechts Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, Dieter Henrich, ed. Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1983.

Hervieu-Leger, Daniele. *Religion as a chain of memory*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Horkheimer, Max, *Eclipse of Reason*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947.

James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a study in human nature: being the Gifford Lectures on natural religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*, New York ; London : Longmans, Green, 1902.

Jensen, George H., *Storytelling in Alcoholics Anonymous : a rhetorical analysis*, Carbondale, IL : Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

Jung, Carl. "The Bill W.-Carl Jung Letters." January 30, 1961.[http://www.rewritables.net/cybriety/the\\_bill\\_w\\_-\\_carl\\_jung\\_letters.htm](http://www.rewritables.net/cybriety/the_bill_w_-_carl_jung_letters.htm) (accessed 07/18/2010).

Kurtz, Ernest. "Alcoholics Anonymous and the Disease Concept of Alcoholism." *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 20, no. 3, 2002.

Kurtz, Ernest and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*, Bantam Books: New York, 1992.

Lash, Scott. "'Power after Hegemony: Cultural Studies in Mutation?'. *Theory, Culture, and Society*. 24. no. 3 (2007): 55-78.

Laszlo, Ervin, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy: Toward a new paradigm of Contemporary Thought*, San Francisco: Harper, 1972.

Lincoln, Bruce, *Discourse and the construction of society: comparative studies of myth, ritual, and classification*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Lowry, Malcolm, *Under the Volcano*, New York: New American Library, 1984. (originally published in 1947)

Lukacs, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971.

Madsen, William. *The Nature-Nurture Controversy in Alcoholic Research and Therapy*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing, 1974.

Mäkelä , Klaus et al., *Alcoholics Anonymous as a mutual-help movement : a study in eight societies*, Madison, Wis. : University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

Marcuse, Herbert, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

Mate, Gabor, MD, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*, Berkeley, CA, North Atlantic Books, 2010.

McGuire, Meredith B., "Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29.3: 283-96.

Meloy, Judith M., *Writing the qualitative dissertation : understanding by doing*, Mahwah, N.J. : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002.

Mieth, Dietmar, and Jacques Pohier, editors ; *The Ethics of liberation--the liberation of ethics*, English language editor, Marcus Lefébure, Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1984.

Minnick, Ann Marie, *Twelve step programs : a contemporary American quest for meaning and spiritual renewal* , Westport, Conn. : Praeger, 1997.

Nelson, James B., *Thirst: God and the alcoholic experience*, Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Christ and culture*, New York: Harper, 1951.

\_\_\_\_\_, *The responsible self : an essay in Christian moral philosophy*, introduction by James M. Gustafson, foreword by William Schweiker, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999, 1963.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *A Genealogy of Morals*, translated by William A. Housemann, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1897.

Noy, Darren, "The Sociological Context of Thich Nhat Hanh's Teachings," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, VI, 3, Summer 2008.

O'Reilly, Edmund B., *Sobering tales : narratives of alcoholism and recovery* , Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.

Petrella, Ivan, editor. *Latin American liberation theology : the next generation*, Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 2005.

Raven, J. *The New Wealth of Nations: A New Enquiry into the Nature and Origins of the Wealth of Nations and the Societal Learning Arrangements Needed for a Sustainable Society*. Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press [www.rfwp.com](http://www.rfwp.com); Sudbury, Suffolk: Bloomfield Books, 1995.

Ray, Veronica, *Design for growth : twelve steps for adult children*, San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1989, 1988.

Rieff, Philip, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, New York:Harper & Row, 1966.

Robbins, Derek, *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991.

Sanders, Thomas G.. "The Puebla Conference." *American Universities Field Staff Reports* 30, no. (1979): 2-9.

Schaef, Ann Wilson, *When society becomes an addict*, San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1987.

Stimmel, Barry, editor; *Cultural and sociological aspects of alcoholism and substance abuse*, New York : Haworth Press, 1984.

Swartz, David, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.



Talbot, Matthew. *Moral Reasons and Personal History: A Rational Competence Account of Moral Responsibility. Dissertation. Department of Philosophy. University of California, Riverside*: 2005.

Taylor, Charles, *Hegel and modern society*, Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 2000.

Thomsen, Robert, *Bill W.*, New York : Harper & Row, 1975.

Vermigli, Peter Martire, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics*, edited by Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland ; with introduction and annotations by Joseph C. McLelland, Kirksville, Mo. : Truman State University Press, 2006.

Weber, Max, *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston: BeaconPress, 1993.

Wilcox, Danny, *Alcoholic thinking : language, culture, and belief in Alcoholics Anonymous*, Westport, CT : Praeger, 1998.

Wilson, William, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1952, 1981.

Wolf, Naomi. "The End of America." Avram Ludwig, Michelle Ngo, Laura Dawn, Michael Mailer, John Buffalo Mailer. 2004. Web, <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-end-of-america/>.

Wolton, Suke, ed., *Marxism, Mysticism, and Modern Theory*, New York : St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Wuthnow, Robert, *Experimentation in American Religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

## **Appendix A: The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous**

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than our selves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God  
contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of  
His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Anonymous, 60)

**Appendix B:**

**The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous**

**One**—Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

**Two**—For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

**Three**—The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

**Four**—Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

**Five**—Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

**Six**—An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

**Seven**—Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

**Eight**—Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

**Nine**—A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

**Ten**—Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

**Eleven**—Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

**Twelve**—Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. (Anonymous, 562)