



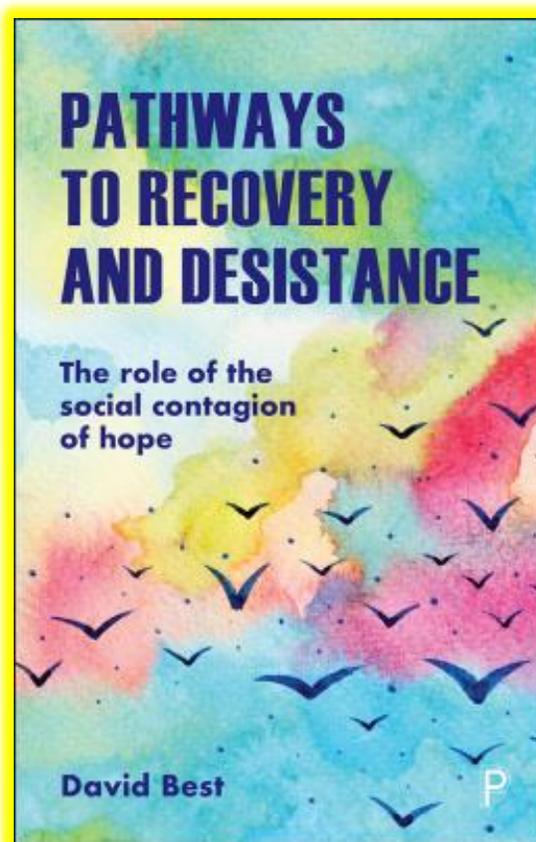
Rebellion Dogs Blog, February 2020 *“Spiritual Experience?” Aftermath: What was Appendix II meant to say to us?*

Once every year or so, we look at the state of atheists/agnostics in AA (and/or other underrepresented populations) in AA and the broader recovery community. I just read something – something I missed in a first go-around of *Writing the Big Book* – that means today’s the day for this review. I’m also reading *Pathways to Recovery and Desistance: the role of the social contagion of hope* (2019).

Each AA member is an individual, but today, we look at early AA members as being from two persuasions:

Our more “religiously inclined” members (supernatural worldview) and, “those agnostically inclined” members (secular worldview).

We look at recently unveiled hints as to what was meant in “Appendix II” of AA’s *Big Book* and to whom was it intended. We’re also going to look at how some members use *AA-speak* to describe their story, borrowing from *Alcoholics Anonymous* language; other members talk about addiction and AA recovery in plain or contemporary language. Hopefully, we tie these ideas together in a look to how the future of recovery (and AA’s place in it) will adapt to accommodate a changing demographic of people with alcohol (and other substance) use disorders.



October 2019, I released a podcast interview with author Bill Schaberg, [Episode 49](#), about his (then) soon-to-be-released, *Writing the Big Book: The Creation of AA*. [November 15th, TheFix.com](#) posted a Rebellion Dogs interview called, “Facts and Fables: William Schaberg Explores the True Origins of AA.” (Click on the links to hear/read more.)

I saw Professor David Best lecture at Recovery Capital Conference of Canada (New Westminster, BC) and he was commenting on a body of evidence, longitudinal studies he has participated in around success factors to persons with substance use disorder re-integrating into life with a new, sober identity. I’m going to take a moment to talk about a five-part framework that Best has found in recovery successes. CHIME (Leamy et al, 2011) is an acronym for Connection, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment¹.

Connection includes a supportive mutual-aid network, recovering family, work and social relationships, access to medical, financial, health and wellbeing supports.

Hope is in the subtitle: *The role of the social contagion of hope*, suggesting that hope is transmitted. Substance and process addicts have to have hope that recovery is possible, hope-inspiring relationships, aspirations and motivation.

Identity is a factor in admitting to ourselves we have a problem – that comes with a new label, our identity as someone in recovery can be a source of pride and we need to feel safety in our identity being supported within a larger community.

Meaning is the antidote to many barriers of sustained recovery: boredom, shame, anxiety and low self-esteem. Reintegrating into a social framework where we feel mastery and purpose and/or creating a new recovery community in which we feel valued is a key to recovery capital.

Empowerment means personal responsibility and the support of community to overcome obstacles and identify our strengths and what we can control in life.

¹ Best, David, *Pathways to Recovery and Desistance: The role of the social contagion of hope*, Bristol UK: Policy Press, 2019, p.110

All five characteristics (CHIME) can be reinforced in peer-to-peer groups. The book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, for better or worse, addresses all five. AA groups do as well. Identity – which will be a focal point of today’s essay – starts with first accepting and, later, hopefully embracing that I (and we) are alcoholics. This brings us together. But still, we are individuals and how much of culture, social status, gender-identity, age and worldview tribalize an otherwise *one big tent* of a recovery community. Identity binds persons with substance use disorder and it can also separate us into sub-cultures under a bigger tent. Some of us will go build another tent, somewhere else, focusing on the differences and fining a surrounding supporting our integrity. Home groups in mutual aid all have their own identity, style, rituals and purpose that both connects them to a whole and acknowledges unique characteristics as well.

We will talk about loyalty and integrity, not a one or the other proposition, a one AND the other balancing act in healthy identity. Some secular AAs identify their legitimate place in AA in the *Big Book* and others have to reject the theistic bias of the book to balance the integrity of their worldview and the loyalty to their AA tribe.

Fun fact: I actually just found this last chapter Thirty-one of *Writing the Big Book*, “Aftermath.”

I had read a PDF before the book was published and somehow, I went right from Chapter Thirty, “Publication Day” to the appendices and end notes. How did I miss it? I don’t know; the publisher’s page² reports the timeline of the book’s scope, “from October of 1937, when a book was first proposed, to April of 1939 when *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published.”

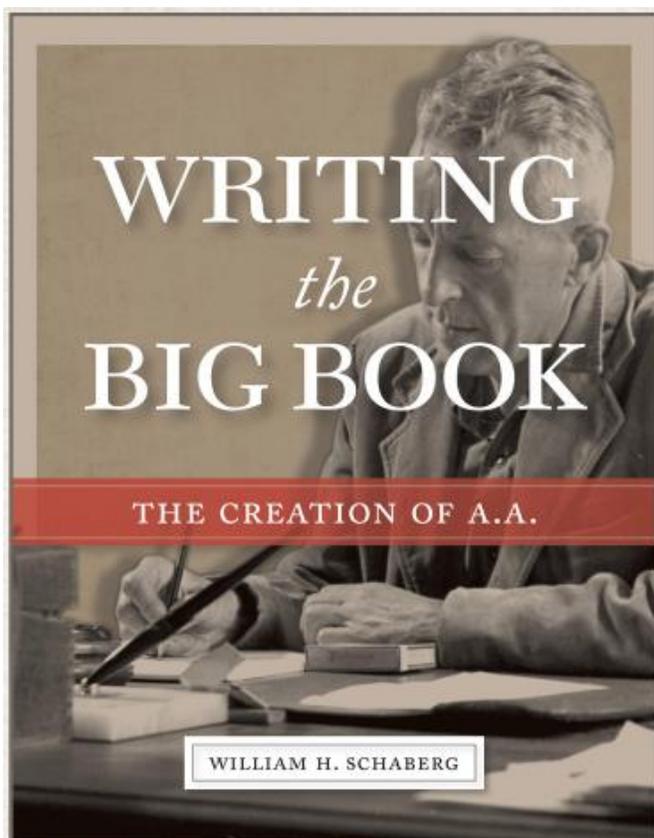
Imagine my surprise; it was like finding a whole new book when flipping through my hardcopy version, just recently. It felt like unburying a lost chapter.

Chapter Thirty-one just happened to be on a timeline and subject matter that I have agonized over: the motivation and rationalization for, and changes made in the second printing of the *Big Book* and especially, the insertion which we now know as “Spiritual Experience.”

² <http://www.writingthebigbook.com/>

As we learned from our interview with William Schaberg, the folktales of the creation of *Alcoholics Anonymous* included some widely held myths about how the book came to be and about life during AA's early "flying blind" years. I call the two years between first and second printing, which informed "Spiritual Experience," as Bill W's "sober-second thought" years.

The addition of an Appendix signifies a perception change, something that Bill W felt needed to be said. Could this be an awakening—not a white light version this time like his Towns Hospital spell, but—"the educational variety" because [it developed] slowly over a period of time (AA, p 567)." In 1939 (and the three years leading up to the first edition, Bill had the collective experience of dozens of sober AAs to borrow from. Now it was 1941 when AA successes numbered 2,000. This larger, more diverse sample size would be eye-opening. The tone of Appendix II is so different from anything in the first 164 pages that I wondered if Bill W wrote what we call today, "Spiritual Experience." I was assured by AA historians, and know it to be true today, that Bill did write it.



As we learned in Rebellion Dogs Radio #49, through the eleven years of primary document research, Bill Schaberg reports that Hank P's, and atheists' efforts to persuade Bill to offer a psychological, behavioral salvation for real alcoholics, in tandem with the "touched by the hand of God" narrative that Bill W so vividly describes based on his experience and testimony of others.

Here's an aside from one armchair-quarterback, me: First, it's part of the historical record that Bill W suffered from depression. Did our founder have a manic side, too? Bipolar wasn't a thing—as far as diagnosis—back in the day; could it

be that Bill's writing spurts were during manic swings? Of our 164 pages of *Big Book*, I hear an undercurrent of the righteousness of the recently converted in the narrative. I'm not calling uncle Bill out on anything I haven't done myself. Some of the poetic language could be construed as hyperbole: "you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny (BB p. 164);" all in caps, poetic yes, but is it overselling?

To any of you creative people out there who struggle with mood swings, are inspirations that find you burning the midnight oil, happening when your higher mood and energy is engaged? I don't mean to play doctor; my mental health doesn't put me in any position to throw stones – I do relate, is all I'm saying. Maybe I'm projecting, but it's something to think about.

Secondly, I think the *Big Book* would read better – and be less contentious – with less use of adjectives. Let's look at some adjective-dependency examples:

- rigorous honesty
- entirely ready
- complete abandon

Ask a grade-school student about honesty – the only honesty is rigorous. And "ready," isn't it like pregnancy; either you are ready, or you aren't? Why make an addict agonize about if we are honest or ready enough? Take my own AA recovery as an anecdotal case. My case is prove-positive that some honesty, some open-mindedness and some willingness will do – no rigorousness, entirety or completeness needed to muddle through.

So, I think "having had a *spiritual* experience, as a result of these Steps" is a case of adjective-dependency (yes, I made up this compound word); "spiritual experience" sounds grandiose.

What would be so lacking in "Step Twelve: Having an experience as a result of these Steps we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all of our affairs"?

I think it's still a dramatic statement without an adjective. And, if you are spiritual, do you/should we go around boasting about it?

A history of irreligious AA - the white-light-lite group:

For the 1941 atheists and agnostic, who this new appendix may have been reaching out to – “it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals” – referring to alienating statements like, “God could and would if He were sought,” “having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps,” or the glorious “But there is one who has all power; that One is God. May you find Him now.”

The caps alone – today’s millennial might tell Bill, “Dude, don’t yell.”

Could it be that this exclusive – not inclusive language was what Bill was making amends for? Or maybe he was compelled to share his more expanded, more enlightened insights.

As many of us in early recovery might be, Bill was enchanted with his own transformation; he called it a spiritual experience that worked where so many other attempts to overcome drinking had failed. With two more years of his own sobriety and 2,000 sober samples instead of a few dozen, like any dynamic, perceptive person, he would know more and he would have expanded his view of the varieties of AA transformations.

So, it was 1941 and Bill knew more sober atheists, agnostics. If AA was similar to the USA average of 5%³, at the time, that’s 100 sober unbelievers. Not too shabby of a sample size. Of course, we had more believers, too. Let’s call these one hundred secular AA members, the “white-light-lite group.”

“This was the great contribution of our atheists and agnostics. They had widened our gateway so that all who suffer may pass through, regardless of their belief or lack of belief.” Bill W, *AA Comes of Age*, p. 167

A common misapprehension is that it was always more religious in the past. These cultural cycles wax and wane. An article points out that the 40’s were about as religious as 2013, the publication date of this article:

³ 1948 USA census data show 91% Protestant or Catholic, 4% Jewish, 0% other religion and 5% none or unreported. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_religion_in_the_United_States

“Earlier generations were always more religious than we are, right? Not always. Religiosity can rise and fall just like other things do over time. In fact, America of the 1940s was about as religious as America today[2013].

Coming out of World War II, America was not very religious. ... The economy improved. The baby boom ensued. And religion grew.

The 1950s were also a time when America began to see itself as a Christian nation in a cold war with atheistic communism. President Eisenhower joined a church after being elected, becoming the first president to be baptized while in office. In 1954, the phrase ‘under God’ was added to the pledge of allegiance to signify the religious stance of the country.”⁴

Check out any *Big Book* and your attention will be drawn to a footnote reference to “Appendix II, Spiritual Experience” on pages 25, 27 and 47, directing you to pp 567-568.

This appendix has a story to tell; the story takes us back to the year, 1941: time for a second printing of the *Big Book*. The first few thousand copies were finally running out. The book wasn’t “selling like hotcakes” until after the Jack Alexander, March 1, 1941 article in *The Saturday Night Post*⁵.

More revelations from William Schaberg’s *Writing the Big Book: The Creation of AA* come beyond page 600. Simply called “Appendix” in the second printing (The Twelve Traditions now occupy Appendix I and “Spiritual Experience is bumped to II). Here’s what *Writing the Big Book* reports: “in the back of the book, which at this point lacked a formal title (“Spiritual Experience”) that was added to the first printing of the second edition in 1955.”

Today’s Appendix II says, “... Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the form of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous...” Schaberg reports, “Bill’s original edits to the piece have been preserved and they provide some interesting insights into his March 1941 thinking on the issue.” This is what was originally penned by Bill W:

⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2014/12/11/1940s-america-wasnt-religious-think-rise-fall-american-religion/>

⁵ https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/p-12_theJackAlexArticle.pdf



“Happily, **for those agnostically inclined**, this conclusion is erroneous.”

The, then-unnamed appendix goes on to describe a secular transformation or recovery from alcoholism.

“Most (not *some*) of our experience” is an educational process that takes time, less often, it’s a sudden flash of light and/or insight. Bill talks of a “an unsuspected inner resource” as agency for recovery. Interesting. I don’t know what Bill’s personal evolution was, but his tone changed. This earthly, practical way to look at learning sobriety is/was clearly set apart in explanation, if not experience, with another eye-opener; here’s more of what was originally written in *Writing the Big Book*:

“**Our more religiously inclined** members call it ‘God-consciousness’”

This is instead of today’s, “Our more religious members...”

The first draft’s wording gave “those agnostically inclined” and “our religiously inclined” members in recovery from alcoholism separate identities but celebrate equality: “educational variety” or “religious experience.” Is that Bill’s intent, I wonder?

I understand why this sober second thought would be of interest to *all members* and prospective members: “Happily for *everyone*, this conclusion is erroneous.” It speaks to both camps. There’s no need for our non-theistic members to fear that the power of example, inner resource and/or Group of Drunks relied upon for sustained recovery is second rate in any way – full stop! This is of course a departure from the tone of the first printing. Also, the message ought to be heard by our theists that there is no need to insist to the not-God squad that a supernatural higher power will eventually have to take the place of their earthly leaning post.

But is this the message and is it clearly conveyed to “everyone”?

1. Please dismiss our warnings that only a personal, anthropomorphic higher power can get a real alcoholic sober
2. Learning is a suitable replacement for praying when it comes to staying sober

Every path is an AA path – secular or spiritual. Like anything, some get it; some don’t.

As a thought experiment let’s imagine the first draft survived and the message from AA’s author was directed specifically to the secular/agnostically inclined; would/could this have made AA as comfortable for atheists and the non-Judeo/Christian adherents as for practicing or lapsed Christians?

“Thankfully for those agnostically inclined” may or may not have solved the worldview-gap that exists in today’s AA. For the nonbeliever who’s been on the receiving end of a condescending, “Keep an open mind” or a “Keep coming back; you’ll get it, eventually,” these microaggressions suggest “Appendix II,” didn’t serve the author’s intended purpose.

Bob K, in his analysis of Appendix II, “Short of a Game Changer”⁶ felt that the concession to nonbelievers didn’t go far enough. In his own “Life’s a (Bobby) Beach” way of seeing things, we read:

⁶ <https://aaagnostica.org/2012/10/21/short-of-a-game-changer-appendix-ii/>

“that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone” is easily answered by the secularist – ‘Yes, by myself I am without power, but together we are strong.’ The caveman needs no God to conquer the saber-toothed tiger, but he does need other cavemen.”

This 2012 commentary got an “Amen” from the choir but not so much from the rest of the spiritual-not religious congregants:

“the Appendix does not fall into the category of a game changer. ... The “Spiritual Experience” ... doesn’t change the game, but it is nice to at least be in the game, even if barely showing on the scoreboard.”

Bobby, would it have been more satisfying to you, if the original scrip survived, “Happily, for the *agnostically inclined*, this conclusion is erroneous”?

Well, it’s got me thinking anyway.

While we nit-pic about Appendix II, any third or fourth edition *Big Book* hanging around the AA clubhouse, page 566 ends with:

“There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance – that principle is contempt prior to investigation.”

– Herbert Spencer

It’s widely held today (and never disproven) that Herbert Spencer never said this. He certainly never wrote it anywhere that was published.

This misattribution, wasn’t always in the *Big Book*:

“the quote attributed to Herbert Spencer, which wasn’t added to ‘Spiritual Experience’ until the third printing of the second edition in 1959 (*Writing the Big Book* p 601).”

For those of you in the “We should update the Big Book” camp, maybe removing the quote or disassociating it from Spencer would be a good test to how receptive The General Service Conference is to change. Why start with original text; can they comfortably change that which Bill Wilson previously changed? And I wonder if there are any records around to answer why the (mis)quote was added

in the late 1950s. Remember that 1941 America was no more religious than 2013 America and it saw a spike in Christianity and secularphobia⁷ through the Cold War years. Is the suggestion that contempt prior to investigation, the suggestion of open-mindedness a flip-flop return to the Chapter Four idea that non-theism is intellectual pride? Willingness and open-mindedness to other views can't be strictly as suggestion for unbelievers is it?

Understandably, if 1959 just isn't cutting edge change enough for you, for readers who find the *Big Book* too religious, or patriarchal, homonormative or unscientific, no one needs to make peace with the *Big Book* or any book to get or stay sober. Put it away. Donate it to a Salvation Army. There are more contemporary books, or migrate from the book covers to YouTube videos, podcasts or other 21st century expressions of the addiction and recovery experience. The 12-Step approach, itself, is optional – in or out of AA.

Secular Recovery Today:

Both inside AA and beyond, the secular view of 12-Step recovery continues to be told. The AA story isn't strictly something that happened in 1939; it's an ongoing, everchanging story.

For those who do want to be at one with your 12-Step community, without denying your values, set aside either/or thinking. How about loyalty AND integrity? In any relationship – family and me, work and me, AA and me – the balancing act is blending loyalty and integrity. I don't have to piss away one to respect the other. We don't have to speak in 12-Step-ese to be included.

John S nailed it on [Episode 145](#) of AA Beyond Belief podcast, speaking with Joe from New Jersey:

“Over the last five years, I guess I've had to unlearn AA speak ... I'm 57 now, and I've been in AA since I was 25. And for 25 years, that was my life, and I knew the language

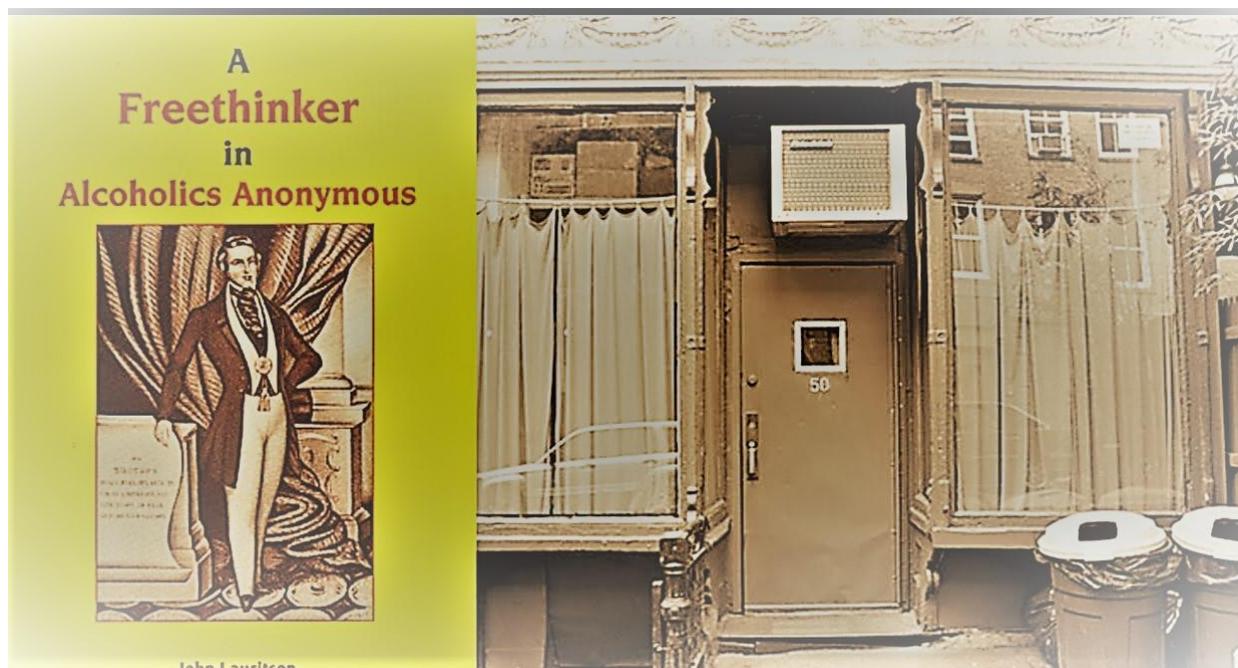


⁷ Dr. Phil Zuckerman coined the anit-atheist term, 'secularphobia'
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-secular-life/201406/why-americans-hate-atheists>

and the lingo, and knowing the language and the lingo kind of got me by. And so, after that 25-year period when I realized I was an atheist, I had enough. I couldn't even bear going to the meetings anymore. ... So, we did start a secular meeting here in Kansas City and since that time, I have been unlearning the language and the lingo. [chuckle]

So, like, 'higher power', that's not the way I talk. ... That's not my language. I never would have, the first place I ever heard that was an AA, you know. ... If people want to talk about that, that's their deal. But I don't use that language, I just use my regular everyday language. Other people help me."

Boom; mic-drop. That's it right there. Completely integral without hostility towards AA. John, previously was loyal to AA but set aside integrity in exchange for belonging, using AA-speak as cover. Now, he doesn't tip-toe around AA with his words: Loyal to AA AND integral to his core-beliefs. We can be unabashedly atheist, feminist, millennial, and be good AA citizens. We need not fit our language into G.O. D. acronyms.



How unorthodox can you go without being "kicked out of the pool?" Read John Lauritsen's [A Freethinker in Alcoholics Anonymous](#). He got sober while Bill W was still alive. Always candid about his atheism, John sees the Steps as being as

religious as praying. So, he didn't do Steps. He's still sober today. What does he do that is AA?

"Probably all sober alcoholics would agree that a requirement for sobriety is not picking up the first drink. Aside from that, alcoholics would give a variety of answers, for A.A. is an individual program.

I would say that for me, A.A. consists of the realization that I am powerless over alcohol; that total abstinence is required on a 24-hour basis; that alcoholics can provide practical help and moral support for each other; that life is worth living and things can get better; that honesty is the basis for lasting sobriety; and so on.

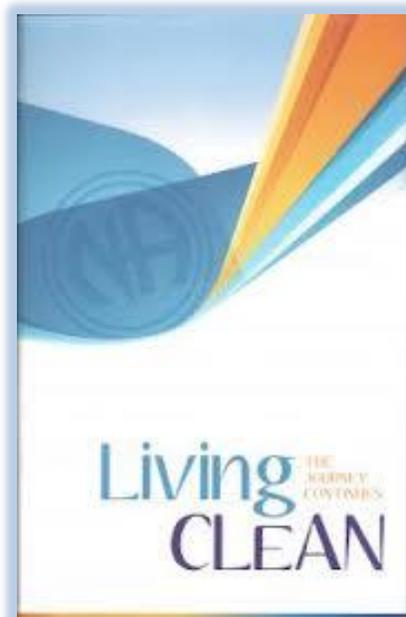
There is no evidence that religious belief is necessary for good sobriety. Thousands of alcoholics have stayed sober and helped others to sobriety without having the slightest belief in the supernatural. ..."

Intriguing? Read the rest of the book. It's real life AA recovery.

More contemporary 12-Step literature logically offers a more inclusive way to explain what happens in the transformation from addiction to wellness. Here's an example from NA's 2012 *Living Clean*:

"We become increasingly aware of our choices, our motives, and our behavior. We come to know what we were thinking when we made a decision, and we recognize the difference between thinking through a decision and reacting or acting on impulse. Listening to our intuition means that we can be open to others without being naïve or foolhardy. We learn to trust our intuition and honor feelings (*Living Clean* p. 172)."

The Victorian era was the setting for Bill W. and Dr. Bob's formative years; no matter how much inclusivity or spirituality they muster, we would



never hear them talking about “trusting our intuition and honor(ing) feelings.” It takes a 21st century book to speak in a contemporary language.

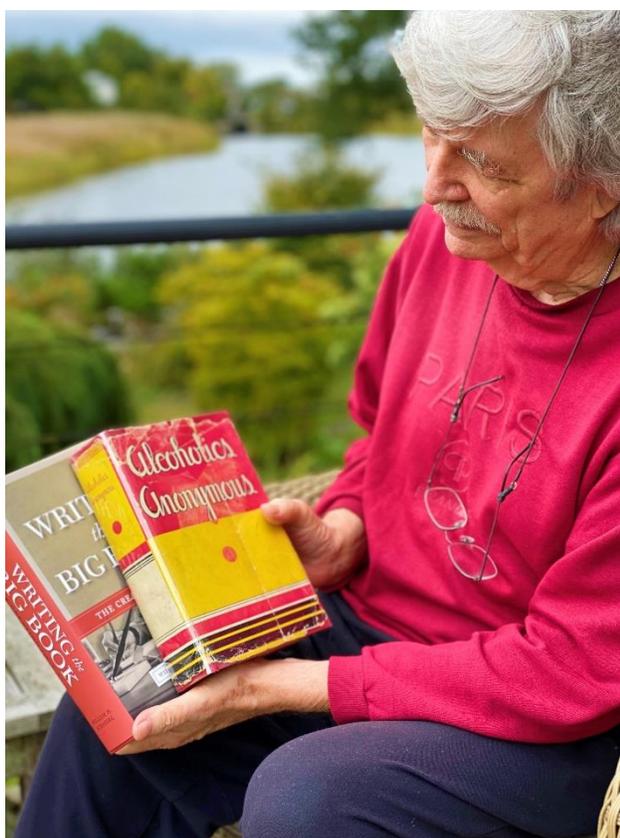
Marijuana Anonymous literature was late-20th century; *Life with Hope* was first written in 1995 and guess what? They update it as needed. My 2012 version says:

“Some of us believe in no deity; a Higher Power may be the strength gained from being part of, and caring for, a community of others. There is room in MA for all beliefs. We do not proselytize any particular view or religion. In MA, each of us discovers a spirit of humility and tolerance... The program of recovery works for people who do not believe in God and for people who do. It does not work for people who think they are God (*Living With Hope* pp. 7-12).”

More from Writing the Big Book: The Creation of AA:

Have you heard the *Big Book* enthusiast’s refrain, “None of the original 164 pages have ever been changed – don’t fix it if it ain’t broke!” in automaton-like drone?

First, they mean well; their ability to help the “still-suffering” is focused on a particular constituency, amiable to bowing to authority in search of sobriety. These enthusiasts are a big help to someone receptive to supernatural intervention. In most cases, they don’t force themselves on anyone. But if you face belligerence, here’s some ammunition – a few selections – some more substantial than others that deconstruct the idea that the sacred text has not been altered. Chapter Thirty-one of *Writing the Big Book* reports, “Edits to the text of the Big Book did not end with its publication. There



were a number of major changes made during the sixteen printings of the first edition (1939-1955) and some less striking ones made to early printings of the second editions (1955-1974). Here are some rebuttal notes to the “*Big Book* has never been altered” myth:

1) The first printing was 179 pages, not today’s 164.

2) Five times in the first printing we referred to ourselves as “ex-alcoholics.” We don’t anymore; I think that’s substantial.

“There were five places in the text where the hyphenated word ‘ex-alcoholic’ had appeared and this was obviously a problem given the Fellowship’s growing insistence that ‘once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic.’ In the eleventh printing three of these phrases were changed to read ‘ex-problem drinker,’ one was changed to ‘understanding fellows’ and the final one became a ‘non-drinking doctor.’”

3) “The changes made to the text for the second printing were among the most substantive ever made. Most important, the wording of the Twelfth Step was changed from ‘Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps...’ to ‘Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of those steps...’ And at the end of this Step, an asterisk was added sending readers to the bottom of the page where they were directed to the newly added [Appendix] in the back of the book ... the change of the word ‘these’ to ‘those’ became a touchstone for argument over the next several years. Saying the necessary ‘spiritual awakening’ was ‘the result of those steps’ rather than ‘these steps’ effectively contributed to one’s spiritual awakening.”

So, if one did subscribe to the AA experience as being a “spiritual experience” and not simply a “sober experience,” the argument would be – on one side – the eleven steps give you enlightenment and then you pass it on, but Bill put so much emphasis on “nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail (*Big Book* p. 89).” Because Bill’s position is that working with drunks helps keep you sober – with or without seeing any burning bush, first – anyone who admitted to alcohol dependency could work with other drunks and help themselves, also.

There were *Big Book* changes that seemingly – not actually – are set in stone. Other changes had a little back and forth in the first 25 years or so.

4) “The word ‘those’ continued to be used in the final fifteen printings of the first edition and also in the first printing of the second edition but it was changed back to the original ‘these’ in the second printing of the second edition (1957).”

Now this is a nit-picky, personal pet peeve note, a bee in my bonnet that didn’t get any ink... In all these changes, why is this error still standing: page one of the book, “Bill’s Story,” still misspells Plattsburgh as “Plattsburg.” Didn’t anyone who was combing through the *Big Book* have a map!??!

There are plenty more changes if you’re into minutia – or more than I am, anyway – especially, if you read Bill Schaberg’s Chapter Thirty-one, “Aftermath.”

If you’re still reading *Writing the Big Book*, don’t skip the Appendices or End Notes; they’re chalked full of good stuff. Of course, don’t do what I did and miss a chapter, either. Oh well. And the new-found chapter (for me) ends with:

“... one thing I feel vitally important is to get the story of how the book was actually written. We get some many distorted stories on the [West] Coast. People talk about the one hundred men that wrote the book. Actually, there weren’t a hundred, as Bill will bear me out, but he said one hundred to make it sound good as though it really was going to work. The people talk as though there were one hundred men, that all went saintly and were taken straight up to heaven and God just guided Bill’s hand – that Bill just sat there and let the words come through. Actually, it wasn’t anything like that at all.’

Dorothy Snyder (Interviewed by Bill Wilson August 20, 1954)

No... it wasn’t anything like that at all”

We need inner resources, self-will – demonized by some – is an inner resource. Also, we need help; what are our external resources? “Recovery Capital is the

breadth and depth of internal and external resources, that can be drawn upon to initiate and sustain recovery from severe alcohol and other drug problems.”⁸

AA sobriety is a pathless land. Many repeat the mantra about *the book* as *the design for living* and these Steps “precisely as written.” Despite seeming influences to conform, we can be empowered in 12-Step recovery. John S’s story is a good example; despite his willingness to go along that satisfied a need for approval, he reflected, made a new boundary and he owned it; others respected it. How many members owe their sobriety to the book? On the other side of the equation, how many members ignore the book completely? How many started it and found another book about addiction and recovery that they found more relatable? I don’t know. I’m happy for everyone’s sobriety.

Sure, the thumpers see the *Big Book* as the way all *real* alcoholics got sober. I know too many who never read the book and are shining examples of AA sobriety and we can’t unlearn what we see. Others read *Alcoholics Anonymous* years after finding contented sobriety.

If we lean towards echo-chambers and limit the types of groups we attend, our views will naturally narrow about what is and what should never be. One thing is for sure is that demographics shift and consequently, the attractiveness of cultural touchstones of the past become less compelling.

Pew Research, at the end of last year, compared America to a decade before:

“the share of ‘nones’ – religiously unaffiliated adults who describe their religion as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” – has reached 26%, up from 17% a decade ago and Nearly 14% of people living in the U.S. in 2017 were born in another country, extending a steady increase over the past few decades.”⁹

Working the 12-Steps exactly as written is “a” way, not “the” way. As *Writing the Big Book* points out, whatever we believe about the 12-Steps “exactly as described in the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*,” we’re learning that not everything we read and heard is/was true. Of course, developing a more critical view of things is

⁸ Granfield and Cloud, 1999; Cloud and Granfield, 2004

⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/13/19-striking-findings-from-2019/>

not an AA-thing; we wrestle with new mysteries as we see further into the universe or deeper into sub-atomic particles. We adapt – or we ought to.

Thanks has to be extended again to William Schaberg for his tireless discipline to bring *Writing the Big Book* to fruition. And, today's final thought aptly goes to Bill White and Ernie Kurtz as they looked at AAagnostica's third anniversary with their usual context and vision in 2014.

“There have been efforts by some within A.A. to Christianize A.A. history and practice, and there have been simultaneous efforts to forge more tolerant space for agnostics and atheists within A.A. Each trend has been sometimes castigated by alarmists as a sign of the corruption and impending downfall of A.A.

From the perspective of its history, we view such diversification within A.A. as an inevitable process of adaptation to the increasingly diverse religious and cultural contexts inherent in the fellowship's worldwide growth. It also reflects adjustment to the realities of religious diversification and secularization in the United States. The future growth and vibrancy of A.A. may well hinge on these adaptive capacities. It remains to be seen whether such developments will nurture and celebrate the growing diversity within A.A., or whether A.A. boundaries will be reactively tightened, likely triggering group schisms, member attrition, and flight to existing or new secular and religious alternatives.”¹⁰

The adventure continues...

¹⁰ <http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/blog/2014/08/aaagnostica-and-the-varieties-of-aa-experience-ernie-kurtz-and-william-white.html>