



Selected Papers of William L. White

www.williamwhitepapers.com

Collected papers, interviews, video presentations, photos, and archival documents on the history of addiction treatment and recovery in America.

Citation: White, W. (2013) Preface: The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps by Roger C. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: AA Agnostica. Posted at www.williamwhitepapers.com

Preface

William L. White

Emeritus Senior Research Consultant
Chestnut Health Systems
bwhite@chestnut.org

“Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.”
(Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939, p. 71)

The worldwide growth of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and the adaptation of AA’s Twelve Steps to innumerable problems of living stand as “living proof” of the catalytic power of this framework for personal transformation. The growth of secular, spiritual, and religious alternatives to AA also confirms AA co-founder Bill Wilson’s 1944 declaration, “the roads to recovery are many” (Wilson, 1944/1988). In 2006, Ernest Kurtz, author of *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, and I published an essay entitled “the varieties of recovery experience.” In that essay, we contended that these growing “varieties” within and beyond AA constitute one of the most important milestones in the history of addiction recovery. Roger C. has provided a valuable service in illustrating such varieties through this collection of how AA’s Twelve Steps have been adapted and interpreted across diverse philosophical, professional, religious, and cultural traditions.

While some grateful AA members perusing this book will think it heresy to change the wording of AA’s Twelve Steps, others will recognize that such tolerance and even celebration of the varieties of recovery experience are deeply rooted with the historical culture of AA. Consider the following from AA co-founder Bill Wilson:

Alcoholics Anonymous does not demand that you believe in anything. All of its Twelve Steps are but suggestions. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952/1981, p. 26)

It is a tradition among us that the individual has the unlimited right to his own opinion on any subject under the sun. He is compelled to agree with no one; if he likes, he can disagree with everyone. (Wilson, 1944/1988, p. 98)

AA’s orthodoxy, if it can be called that, is merely what the majority experience suggests. You can still take your pick! (Wilson, 1962/1988, p. 274)

The growing varieties of AA experience and secular and religious

alternatives to AA are reflected in two emerging worldwide trends.

First, references to “Are you in the Program?” once referred to one’s identification with a particular recovery fellowship. Answers to this question today are likely to reflect identification with a much broader 12-Step community. What is emerging is a more encompassing “12-Step cultural consciousness” that reflects an expanded definition of “recovery community”—one that embraces multiple “communities of recovery.” How such consciousness will expand the doorways of entry into recovery and be mobilized as a force for cultural change remains to be seen.

Second, the philosophical diversification of recovery pathways and the recognition of the viability of alternative pathways are creating a larger level of mutual identification. People who once defined themselves only as AA, NA, SOS, SMART Recovery, WFS, or Celebrate Recovery members are today much more likely to also see themselves as “people in recovery.” Recovery mutual aid groups that once existed as closed systems in competition and conflict with one another are much more likely today to see themselves as part of a larger linked network of communities of recovery. Even co-attendance across religious, spiritual, and secular pathways of recovery is becoming common.

We are seeing on the heels of these trends the beginning cultural and political mobilization of people in recovery into a worldwide recovery advocacy movement whose core tenets include the following: 1) long-term addiction recovery is a reality in the lives of millions of individuals and families, 2) there are multiple pathways of long-term recovery, and 3) all pathways of

recovery are cause for mutual celebration. Contributions like *The Little Book* that chart the growing varieties of 12-Step experience and how the Steps are interpreted will only speed growth of this movement.

William L. White

Author, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America*

References

Alcoholics Anonymous: The story of how more than one hundred men have recovered from alcoholism. (1939). New York: Works Publishing Company.

Alcoholics Anonymous. (1952/1981). *Twelve steps and twelve traditions.* New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

White, W., & Kurtz, E. (2006). The varieties of recovery experience. *International Journal of Self Help and Self Care*, 3(1-2), 21-61.

Wilson, B. (1988). Comments on Wylie ideas. In *The language of the heart: Bill W.'s Grapevine writings* (pp. 97-99). New York: The AA Grapevine, Inc. (Reprinted from AA Grapevine, 1944).

Wilson, B. (1988). Where willpower comes in. In *The language of the heart: Bill W.'s Grapevine writings* (pp. 272-274). New York: The AA Grapevine, Inc. (Reprinted from AA Grapevine, 1962).