

Department of Philosophy Speakers' Series



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Alcoholics Anonymous Uncovered

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a cultural institution which is well respected in society at large. Most people seem to know someone who has recovered from his/her alcoholism because of AA, and it is widely believed that the organization has helped millions. Most people know that AA is some kind of support group where recovering alcoholics gather to assist and support one another, and that it is a 'spiritual' rather than a religious program. However, most people only know part of the story.

The first point I will argue is that AA is not just a spiritual program; it is an overtly religious organization. I will show how AA emerged out of a evangelical religious group called the Oxford Group Movement, looking at the history of the Oxford Group Movement, showing how AA emerged from it, and examining the early years of AA. The AA program, its Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, will be presented, and I will show that the AA program is identical with the religious principles of the Oxford Group Movement. Finally, I will review some empirical evidence about AA's efficacy. The evidence shows that AA is not particularly helpful for many exposed to it, that AA's claims of success are terribly inflated, and that its methods can actually be counterproductive. However, AA is still widely presented as the only cure for alcoholism; those who fail at AA are declared to have failed because they failed to "work the program," rather than the program *failed to work for them*. Instead, I will argue that many people do not find lasting sobriety through AA attendance because they find the theology of AA anathema. As such, AA and the many programs modelled on it have done a lot of harm to many people struggling to cope with a wide range of substance abuse issues.

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4:00 p.m.
C-640

Everyone Welcome