The final item of empirical evidence, pointing to a link between alcoholism and religion, is the well-known but only partially explained fact that the most effective program ever devised for treating alcoholics is essentially a spiritual program—A.A. There may be other dimensions to the explanation of this fact that previous studies, largely sociologically and psychologically oriented, have found. Intensive study of A.A. experiences in general and the so-called “spiritual angle” in particular may prove to be productive, especially if undertaken by those whose training bridges the disciplines of the behavioral sciences, on the one hand, and philosophy, comparative religion and theology, on the other. Studies by those within the discipline of the psychology of religion may produce new illumination of the dynamics of this striking social phenomenon.

**EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY AND ALCOHOLISM**

When ancient man stumbled by accident on the product of fermentation, he must have felt that strange, even miraculous, things were happening to his inner world. When he drank the juice of fruits, grains or honey which had been left in a warm place for a time, his fears and burdens lost their weight. His painful awareness of disease, death and injustice lost its sting. The monotony and drabness of his life were interrupted. He felt lifted out of the horizontal earth-boundness of his daily existence into a temporary experience of the vertical dimension of life. Small wonder that he regarded the substance that could produce these effects as a mysterious gift of the gods.

In a much later period, Thomas Wolfe gives a vivid picture of the way in which alcohol gives some persons a powerful experience of transcending their feelings of weakness and finitude. Intoxicated for the first time, Eugene, in *Look Homeward, Angel*, muses:

In all the earth there was no other like him, no other fitted to be so sublimely and magnificently drunken. . . . Why, when it was possible to buy God in a bottle, and drink him off, and become God oneself, were not men forever drunken?  

**9**

The similarity of this statement to that of Bill W. is noteworthy.

Fromm holds that the emergence of man from the womb of nature into self-awareness, reason and imagination brought with it the burdens of a sense of estrangement from nature and one's fellows.  

**10** Nietzsche's insight is relevant at this point: "Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but Nature which has become estranged, hostile or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal, man."  

**11** A part of the

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