

**Complete text of Stephanie's response to ["The Irrationality of Alcoholics Anonymous"](#) (The Atlantic Magazine, April 2015).**

An excerpt appeared in "The Conversation" (June 2015)

I felt a sense of sorrow and wonder as I read Gabrielle Glaser's article about Alcoholics Anonymous. Haven't we been here before? As a long-term professional in the addictions field, and an academic interpreter of AA, I remember these arguments against AA from the 1970s when the same adversarial challenges were mounted by professionals in the "scientific" community to prove that AA doesn't work, or more importantly, that it is not necessary to stop drinking if you have a problem with alcohol.

It is a false dichotomy to pit science against AA, as if they are comparable and there is a right way and a wrong way. They are not comparable, though many people who ultimately find AA started treatment with medicines and programs to help them control their drinking. For some, the medical approach is enough. Others eventually want to stop drinking and, when the desire comes from within, they often find AA. The process is a continuum rather than a binary choice.

Why do some in the "scientific" community need to challenge AA? Why is there so much anger towards an organization that does not purport to cure anybody or to be "scientific"? Nothing about AA is comparable to medical treatments or any other applied means of help, so why do some in the "science" arena believe that it is valid to evaluate AA from the framework of scientific principles and research methods?

AA simply welcomes people who want to stop drinking. AA provides the structure and the experience, strength and hope of its members, but it is the individual who must do the work. AA is not getting anybody sober. If you want to drink, you'll likely stay away from AA.

Still, observers and critics make the comparisons. In my view, American society is caught in a problematic bias that elevates rational science as the ultimate source of all knowledge. With an equal bias towards dichotomous, concrete thinking and its illusion of certainty, there will be no room for a continuum or an acceptance of other sources of knowledge, such as the wisdom of personal experience and faith.

Science provides the data and medical interventions that are often enormously helpful. AA provides support for the person who wants to stop drinking and guidelines on how to do it.

Any chance that critics of AA could tell us about the positives of what science is learning about alcoholism without condemning AA in the process?

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