“Remarkably Free From Bores”

Presented at the Philosophical Club of Cleveland, November 22nd, 1988
By
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This paper at one level is about private clubs in general and our own in particular; at another level, it is about selectiveness, exclusion and social discrimination.

I hold in my mind a vision of an idealized London pub or coffee house where, as a "regular," one can enjoy a "respite from the treadmill between home and office" (Oldenburg and Brissett, "The Essential Hangout," Psychology Today, April, 1980).

Joseph Addison, founder of The Spectator, saw the London pubs as a place of easy society where "men are....knit together by a Love of Society, not a Spirit of Faction," where they are "combined for their own Improvement, or for the Good of others, or at least to relax themselves from the Business of the Day, by an innocent and Cheerful conversation."

Professors Oldenburg and Brissett in their 1980 Article called "The Essential Hangout," in Psychology Today, noted the passing in America of such traditional hangouts and a narrowing of "arenas for social participation" to the office and the home.

In their view:

> "The quality of many people's lives has come to depend almost exclusively on the quality of their family life and of their jobs. Not surprisingly, they expect too much from both and are, inevitably disappointed. That is when they dream that all-American dream of 'getting away from it all' or turn to psychotherapy or to commercially packaged diversions that often prove to be more enervating than invigorating."

The authors urge a return to the concept of the "third place," an "essential hangout" that encourages free expression, even emotional expression and one in which participants "surrender their worldly status in return for unqualified acceptance into human fellowship." In third places, "chatter and banter link...different people by spiritual rather than contractual bonds, giving to individuals a sense of wholeness, belonging and continuity."

In this idealized "third place," as you can see, social qualification is not the premise on which sociability depends. The sociologist George Simmel has characterized the sociability of such third places as life's most purely democratic experience.

There seems to be a marked contrast between the idealized, democratic "third place" that originated in the English pubs and coffee houses and the famous English clubs, whose origins date from the reign of Henry IV typically in rooms of those same early pubs. These social, political, literary, sporting and artistic clubs, so characteristic of our view of English life, all appeared to

practice exclusion in some form, whether on the basis of social standing, common interest or eminence in a particular field. It is, parenthetically, all the more remarkable that the all-male Apollo Club, founded in about 1616 by Ben Johnson, adopted the practice of admitting women on special nights.

In the United States, clubs modeled on their English counterparts developed as a function of increasing urbanization. Like their counterparts, American clubs were characterized by social exclusiveness or by selectivity based on achievement or mutual interest. Women's clubs have a distinctly American urban middle-class origin and their activities early extended beyond the traditional leisure interest in Art, literature and gardening, to social problems and public affairs.

At the time of Cleveland's Centennial, in 1896, six years before the founding of this Club, the women of Cleveland left a message in a time capsule to be opened in 1996 addressed "To Women Unborn":

> "We bequeath you a city of a century, prosperous and beautiful, and yet far from ideal.
>
> Some of our streets are not well lighted; some are unpaved; many are unclean.
>
> Many of the people are poor and some are vainly seeking work at living wages.
>
> Some of our children are robbed of their childhood.
>
> Vice parades our streets and disease lurks in many places. Sometimes the reins of government slip from the hands the people and public honors ill-fit some who wear them.
>
> Have you invented the flying machine or found the North Pole?
>
> We have appropriated millions of money for the execution of plans. Among them are the improvement of the harbor and the widening, straightening and cleaning of our narrow, crooked and befouled river."

The historian, Oscar Handlin, has observed of this same period that the shifts in social structure and values produced by rapid industrialization and the successive waves of immigration that occurred between 1870 and 1920, resulted in a growing concern with status and privilege among older American groups. In this era, he notes, discrimination and exclusion "infected broad areas of American life." Paradoxically, perhaps, this was also the "progressive" era in which government experimented with public ownership and other means of controlling the excesses of private corporations in the interest of the public as a whole. It was in this era that the Philosophical Club of Cleveland had its beginnings.

> "The suggestion has been made by several gentlemen, residents of the East End, that a club for the discussion of philosophical, social or municipal problems, would be pleasant and profitable".

So began a graceful, handwritten invitation extended to ten Clevelanders of substance, to attend a meeting Tuesday, October 7, 1902 in the office of the President of Case School of Applied Science. From that meeting, the Philosophical Club of Cleveland began its formal history of social and intellectual discourse, now extending well beyond the lifetimes of its founders.

The deeper origins of the Club can be traced, remotely, to the clubs of London and more immediately to the pleasant interactions several of the founders had enjoyed as members of the Logos Club, later the "Cleveland Council on Sociology". As the 1902 invitation explained:

> "Some of us have been members of the Cleveland Council of Sociology and have profited by its papers and discussions. It has been a source of some regret to us that the increase in its membership has latterly deprived the Council of its peculiar advantages as a place for serious and frank discussion".

Thus, the offer was extended to join a "small club, with a membership strictly limited and confined principally to residents of the East End, which would be to you what the Council formerly was."

The format of the meetings of the Council on Sociology provided a ready format for the meetings of the new club. As Charles Summer Howe, one of the founders of the Philosophical Club recalled in a letter dated January 3, 1933, gathered as part of the Club's historical record:

> "The meetings [of the Council on Sociology] were held once in two weeks in a private dining room of the old Forest City House…We met at six o'clock for dinner. After the table was cleared, someone read a paper which was then discussed. The meeting was like a family party. Nearly everyone had something to say about the paper and it was understood that each one should say just what he thought and that no offense was taken."

The men who attended the October meeting were drawn from various academic, professional, religious and business pursuits. It is safe to observe that while each had achieved a certain standing in his respective field they were as much selected for their reputation for lively discourse. But it is also apparent that they represented the upper stratum of the class-conscience society of the day: all white, overwhelmingly college graduates, all male and, as far as can be determined, all Protestants in religious belief.

During its first twenty years, the majority of its I members were from New England, New York, New Jersey or Pennsylvania. Harvard, Yale, Oberlin and Western Reserve each claimed 4 members and Hiram, Kenyon and Union Theological Seminary 3 each. An informal study of the favorite amusements of 56 of the early members showed a large interest in golf and outdoor activity, including one respondent whose favorite amusement was polar expeditions.

Seven founding members of the Club attended the October 7th meeting in the President's office at Case. Charles Howe, then 44 years old, was the host and President of Case School of

Applied Science. The letter of invitation had been signed by President Howe and by Charles H. Benjamin, two years older than Howe, who was then head of the department of mechanical engineering at Case, Arthur S. Wright, Professor of Modern Languages at Case and Professor Herbert A. Aikens, a professor of History at Western Reserve. Of the other ten invited, three were in attendance: Thomas L. Johnson, a lawyer of wide interests (not the then mayor of Cleveland, Tom L. Johnson), later an organizer of the Print Club, John W. Langley, professor of chemistry and electrical engineering at Case and brother of the noted astronomer, Samuel P. Langley, and Frank M. Comstock, professor of natural history at Case.

The remaining seven, who had each apparently expressed interest in, joining the Club, were Mat to on M. Curtis, professor of philosophy at Western Reserve, Henry Eldridge Bourne, professor of history at Flora Stone Mather, dean of the faculty and an expert on the French Revolution, John Whittlesey Walton, a Cleveland businessman and philanthropist, the founder of a ship chandlery business, Charles D. Williams, Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Rev. James D. Williamson, the Acting President of Western Reserve, Albert J. Alexander, a retired Presbyterian minister, and Robert Walton Deering, professor of German Languages at Western Reserve.

According to the minutes of the first meeting, those present unanimously approved several organizational principles which included the following description of the topics for the papers to be presented by the Club:

> "the topics to be discussed should be along the lines of sociology, economics, literature, government, philosophy and science, strictly technical subjects, politics and theology being excluded".

No doubt this afforded sufficient breadth to maintain the interest of the members and allay the fears of those who felt unqualified to address purely philosophical topics. As the Rev. James D. Williamson later observed:

> "I do not recall to whom we are indebted for the suggestion of the name "Philosophical", but to some of us it seemed a bit highbrow, and even alarming if it was intended that papers should be presented along philosophical lines".

The seven men present on October 7 appointed a committee on organization and the date for the inaugural meeting was fixed at Tuesday, November 18, 1902. Before adjourning, it was agreed that additional invitations would be extended to seven men, bringing the total membership to 21 if all accepted. This group included two lawyers, the pastor of the First Unitarian church, the head of the Cleveland Public Library, a businessman and two professors. Of the group, Newton D. Baker, then the city solicitor in Tom L. Johnson's administration (and only recently arrived in Cleveland) and Professor Edward William Morley were men whose accomplishments later brought them national acclaim. According to Rev. Williamson, the fame achieved by its various members was always a source of quiet pride to members of the Club. In the early days, Rev. Williamson said,

> "[T]he two names Langley and Morley were enough to give distinction and character to any club."

At the Club's first full meeting on November 18, the report of the organizational committee was approved, the first officers were elected and lots were drawn for the order of presentation of papers. Professor Howe later recalled that the system of drawing lots for the order of papers after the first was to assure that there were "no drones in the hive".

Professor Langley was elected President and Herbert Aikens was elected Secretary. During the early years of the Club, it was not the practice of the secretary to record the contents of the paper or the discussion that followed. Of President Langley's inaugural paper called "With the Pickets", founder John Walton had this recollection, in 1922:

> "Of this paper no one now living can surely remember the exact drift, the prevailing opinion; however, being that it had to do with the advanced outposts of scientific progress".

Mr. Walton in his history of the first 20 years of the Club has also given us a fleeting glimpse of the other papers presented at the club during the first twenty years. Thirty-six of the 250 papers presented related to "Policies at Home and Abroad", 20 to "Schools and Education", 16 to "Biography"; Fifteen to "Municipal and Rural", and 12 each to "Sociology" and "Psychology". The rest were scattered with "Philosophy" itself accounting for only 5. If there ever was, in fact, a taboo on politics and religion, as suggested by the club's entry in the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, it seems that it was honored more in the breach since Mr. Walton's records show 10 papers on "Ethics and Religion", in addition to the 36 on "Policies at Home and Abroad".

The titles of the early papers themselves tantalize the imagination and reflect the interest of the members in the current issues of the day. Imagine for a moment settling in for a consideration and discussion of papers such as these:

> "The Labor Trust", by Thomas L. Johnson
> "Social Democracy and its Lessons", by Arthur Wright
> "Does Society Owe Every Man a Chance to Make a Living?", by Rev. Williamson
> "The Negro Problem", by Rev. Williamson
> "Suppression of the Individual in our Modern Industrial System", by Rev. Charles Williams
> "The Worst Vices of a Large City", by Newton D. Baker
> "Immigration as related to Lawlessness and Penury in Cleveland", by John Walton

I can imagine that the audience was large and maybe a little rambunctious on the night of March 15, 1910 when Rev. Minot Simmons of the Unitarian Church presented his paper on "Substitutes for the Saloon." And there may have been some squirming when, on April 11, 1911. Dr. H. W. Osborn gave his paper on the "History of Circumcision".

Our imagination must also supply an idea of the range and vigor of the discussion. As early as the meeting of February 24, 1903, a rule was adopted to the effect that "no member shall speak in discussion for more than 5 minutes or more than once until all others have had a chance". Rev. Williamson, for his part, said he could not recall that the rule ever had to be invoked "which is perhaps in itself a sufficient indication that the Club in the selection if its members kept itself remarkably free from bores."

It seems to have been the universal recollection of the founding members heard upon the subject that the attractions of the Club did not include physical comfort and appetizing cuisine. As Rev. Williamson put it:

> "The Club in its beginnings did not cater much to appetite and bodily comfort but depended for its attraction on good fellowship and food for the mind."

For two years, the Club met in what Rev. Williamson described as a "barren room at the top of Case School", three flights up. This was the Case lunch room. The papers were presented in the President's office. Rev. Williamson recalled, delicately,

> "The supper...was not very inviting but all that we had a right to expect from the meager restaurant equipment that was provided". "If [the price] exceeded 509, I should say we were easy marks".

The food and its cost and the meeting place were subjects of much discussion throughout the Club's history. It did not take long after the initial move to the University Club in 1904 for the members to become dissatisfied with the menu and the cost of food. The minutes of the first meeting in February of 1905, reflect that complaints were made to the house committee of the University Club but that "a better dinner could not be secured [there] for less than one dollar a plate". Therefore, the Club moved to the Unity Church at Euclid and East 82nd Street where it met from 1905 until 1909. In January of 1910 (foreshadowing the great debates on the subject by this club 70 years later) it was resolved that "each member be assessed 25¢ for each meeting he does not attend".

John Walton, with his businessman's eye for detail, reported in his 1922 paper that 23 meetings were held at Case, one at the Alhambra Restaurant, one at the Union Club, 55 at the Unitarian Church and 163 at the University Club. He also noted that the club members during the first 20 years claimed authorship of 166 books, 75 of which were authored by Minot T. Savage, a minister.

The personality and wit of the secretary occasionally broke through the usually staid and spare recitals of the minutes. In March of 1913, he reported that the meeting was brought to "approximate order" and that the minutes were read "in English". Later in the month, a typewritten poem was inserted in place of the usual laconic recital of attendance and the title of the evening's paper. It read:

On March eighteenth, a Tuesday night,
There met at early electric light
Our honorable fraternity,
At Club called University,
with usual scrupulosity
To dine and talk philosophy;
Smoke also, incidentally,
And dish each other amicably.
Now first of all, most reverently
And yet with satisfying brevity,
A grace was said, then one and all
On Luther's gifts began to fall.
The men around our goodly board,
Eighteen in number, I'll record.
First Corostock, constant veteran,
Then curtis, u.s. census man,
The smiling Dake and Fay assist,
While Fowler, archeologist,
Gilchrist was there, out group to gladden
While at the top sat old Judge Hadden.
Henry his mighty form displayed,
Next to him sat Jackson, unafraid.
Osborn and Savage, Simons, Smith,
Williamson, Wright, Staley, forthwith,
While in one chair, contented, very,
Sat Treasurer and Secretary.

The chairman rapped at seven ten;
The Club to order came, and then
Minutes of meeting March the fourth
Were read. The Club approved their worth.
Prof. Wright then gave an explication
of some Phases of Education
Within a great Democracy.
Discussion followed, full and free.
After its theses were discussed
The members voted that it must
Be given more publicity.
Wright, with his usual modesty
Protested it was not so fine.
The Club adjourned at the past nine.

While the formal minutes are, indeed, scant, much writing of distinction and substance is found in the resolutions framed by the committees of members on the occasion of the death of a member which are scattered through the early handwritten minute books.

Early club members recalled that a set of humorous resolutions was prepared on the occasion of the election, in 1911, of Mr. Baker as Mayor of Cleveland. Mr. Baker, in his gracious response, said "If I may use a Shakespearean characterization of these resolutions, I think they are 'most excellent fooling'".

In total, the early records of the club give one the impression of a lively, self-selected group of educated men of similar background joined, as in a "third place," more by bonds of fellowship and lively conversation than by motives of self-advancement or recognition of achievement. But there remains, nevertheless, the issue of exclusion--an exclusion that conformed, with no apparent discomfort, to the patterns of the day.

John Walton gave expression to the spirit and function of the Club in those early years and, as well, described what he believed to be its purpose and its vision.

> "Clubs like our own are modest in their character, their history is not writ large, little or nothing appears about them in city directories. ...They own no imposing buildings; their transactions make no copy of the daily or weekly press."
>
> "Propounding no cult, announcing no mission of reform, these "good fellows" meet as friends, each member, in turn laying upon the anvil a hot iron from his individual forge, which is more or less re-shaped during the succeeding process by his helpers and all is over."
>
> "But is it? Let us drop the metaphor. We are dealing now not with metal but with human, vital thought, an altogether different material. Who can tell where these thought waves shall end or upon what distant shore, it may be, their echoes extended and magnified, shall proceed hither to undreamed of results?"

It is to this latter expression of lofty vision and to the issue of exclusion that I wish to address some modest observations.

Viewed in light of the times, it does not seem especially surprising that the province of ideas that might produce "hitherto undreamed of results" should be a province populated entirely with educated, white, male Protestants of similar background. The arenas of the day for social intercourse among people of diverse beliefs and background were largely "public" in nature and that which was "private" then enjoyed an especially wide and exclusionary sweep. The Philosophical Club of Cleveland was "remarkably free from bores" but also from religious, racial and cultural minorities and, of course, women.

Social historians remind us that it was not until the thirties that the scope of the "public" interest became substantially larger and that of the purely "private" interest, substantially narrower.

In my lifetime, the more flagrantly unjust forms of social and economic discrimination have been slowly reduced by legal action. Today, the main areas of legally accepted institutional prejudice remain in private clubs, suggesting that "while the thornier branches of social injustice are gradually being removed, its roots have still gone largely undisturbed." ("Privacy" and Prejudice, A Survey of Religious Discrimination in Social Clubs, Anti-Defamation League 19__).

Since the time, in 1953, that I sat next to Eleanor Roosevelt in the faculty lunchroom at Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey, social exclusion has made me uneasy. Here was a woman of grand stature and bearing who used the full measure of her position in aid of the oppressed-- a women whose spirit was truly egalitarian and who had high hopes for an America free of discrimination if not of prejudice itself.

The "oppressed" seemed to be in short supply in our almost entirely white, suburban, middle-class New Jersey high school, itself, no doubt, an enclave of privilege and exclusion.

In that suburban oasis, clubs, or at least extra-curricular activities, did, to a certain extent, mark off your place in social spectrum: The Radio Club or the Latin Club put you in one place, the Personality Club and the sports teams in quite another. But in those days, the most-favored place of all on the spectrum was still reserved for the "all-around" young man or women, a gad-fly who achieved recognizable accomplishments in every conceivable field of activity and did so with apparent ease. Except for the sports teams, women enjoyed access to and success in every aspect of school activity.

In my circle, there was disdain for socially-exclusive private schools and especially boarding schools. They seemed akin to the dreaded "reform school". You were put there for unspeakable offenses. They were certainly undemocratic - even more restricted preserves of exclusiveness - but they were also largely irrelevant. You got something of the latter sense also about the one country club in town. It was fashionable for friends whose parents were members at least to feign disinterest and be a little apologetic about its "WASP-only" restrictiveness.

Jewish students in our school in the 50's" were largely from "assimilated" families, culturally removed from the ghettos of Newark and New York. The family of my classmate, Maxine Groffsky, formed the real life basis for the family Phillip Roth of West Orange, New Jersey, wrote about in Goodbye Columbus. It was true that the wealthier Jewish families, no doubt because of social discrimination, lived in one development of spacious modern homes called “Newstead”, a name easily converted to epithet. But this was in the dim background. The Jewish sports” and literary heroes lived on my side of town. They let me play on the Jewish Community Center Eighth Grade Basketball Team. Their religious practices were no more exotic and certainly more interesting to me than those of my catholic friends.

In the mid-fifties, we didn't think much about racial discrimination either. There were three blacks in our class of over 300. I remember experiencing deep shock when one of the three blacks in our class expressed deep and surprisingly hostile racial feelings. That was, to me, as irrelevant as it’s opposite. In the fifties all of us, white, black, catholic, protestant or jew in our enclave of privilege seemed to be going somewhere and inclusiveness was good for everyone.

Issues of exclusion were less subtle and more difficult at Cornell. Fraternities enticed freshman with pleasure akin to the English clubs in the days of Sir Walter Raleigh. They offered the relief of baronial comforts from the cement block institutionalism of the dormitories. There were to. be "smooth" parties, spirited discourse and a lively social life. But you paid a hidden price. There were then 54 fraternities at Cornell, each practicing its own form of social discrimination. A number of the national fraternities still institutionalized their prejudice under restrictive by-laws. There were houses for jews of social standing, houses for "jocks", houses for serious tweeds (largely from the dreaded boarding schools) houses for intellectuals and even houses expressly for "nerds". You made your choice. They made their choice. Some were left out. You left them behind or maybe, I later thought, they left you behind.

In any event, I quickly judged that the fraternity, in 1954, was not an Americanized Apollo Club. It cut you off from friends who were not "brothers". The smooth parties occasionally wound up with the brothers sliding on the floor lubricated without and within by quantities of milk-punch. The rituals seemed empty and full of a kind of misguided chauvinism and not a little-hypocrisy. I sought the larger, more polyglot world of fellowship and accomplishment.

Thereafter, clubs still marked my place on the social spectrum to some extent, but with an important difference. There was the Savage Club of Ithaca and the honorary Quill and Dagger Society, the former a branch of a London club established in 1857, which was exclusively devoted to the performing arts and required a try-out, and the latter a so-called Senior Men's Honorary Society, with its own baronial quarters at. the top of one of the war memorial towers. In each there was selection based on some form of achievement and inclusive by-laws if not totally inclusionary practices, practices, I am happy to say, the intervening thirty years have largely erased.

From that day to this I have looked for associations characterized by a generous inclusiveness and which are based in some measure on achievement or at least on the pursuit of shared interests, rather than on religious or cultural background or on. social standing. The "third place"--with its democratic informality--remains my ideal. I am uneasy about clubs that are inclusionary in theory but exclusionary in practice. And in this area, still largely beyond the reach of laws against discrimination, there is an opportunity to examine one's private beliefs and commitments and act freely on them.

Cleveland Armory has decried the lack of leadership in many of our most prestigious still private clubs to address the moral issues implicit in exclusion. There was, of course, the resignation of Eleanor Roosevelt from the Colony Club in New York over the black balling of Mrs. Henry Morgenthau. In March, 1962, several leading members of the Kennedy administration resigned from the Cosmos Club, the citadel of Washington intellectual life because it refused admission to the distinguished black journalist, Carl T. Rowan. Attorney General Robert Kennedy resigned from the Metropolitan Club, the most distinguished social club in Washington, because of its policy barring members from bringing Negro guests. In general, however, policies barring or limiting Jewish, black, women, or minority members have persisted to this day, on the basis that rights of private and private "expressive" association are constitutionally protected rights and therefore that purely private discrimination is beyond the legal reach of public laws against discrimination. But the walls of legal exclusion are still very much under attack.

In May, 1987, the Supreme Court of the United States held that application of California's anti-discrimination statute to the Rotary Club chapter in Duarte, California, so as to require it to admit women, did not violate club members' federal constitutional right to freedom of association or expressive association under the First Amendment.

While the result turned to some extent on the broad interpretation by the California courts of what constituted a "business establishment" (i.e.” everything about which one can be employed" and a "permanent commercial force or permanent settled position"), the Supreme Court determined that "the relationship among club members is not the kind of intimate or private relation that warrants constitutional protection". Rotary's purpose, as expressed in its manual

> "[was] to produce an inclusive, not exclusive, membership making possible the recognition of all useful local occupations and enabling the club to be a true cross-section of the business and professional life of the community".

The court further held that the admission of women would have no adverse effect on the clubs' traditional expressive activities and, in fact, might enhance its capacity for broadened community service. Any slight infringement on the right of expressive association, the court said, is more than justified "by the State's compelling interest in eliminating discrimination against women."

While Justice Powell was careful to point out that its decision was limited to the facts of the Rotary Club, it seems clear that heretofore exclusive clubs that, in fact, enhance the business standing of their members and take on some aspect of public function have had much occasion in the past year to examine their exclusionary admissions practices.

And so we come to what in John Walton's phrase is the "hot iron" from my "individual forge" that I lay before you tonight.

The records of this Club that I have reviewed show a remarkable course of free debate and discussion in an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship. More, they reflect the thoughtful assessments of the members about the larger issues of the day and chronicle the vast changes that have taken place in our society since the "Women of Cleveland", in 1896, pondered the coming of the "flying machine". What does not appear is much" about what the Club believed of itself, the part succeeding generations of members thought they were playing as a Club, as an institution.

The Constitution and By-laws first adopted in 1911 impose no explicit barriers to membership on the basis of race religion, sex or national origin yet it seems plain that the members themselves over the years have imposed self-selecting criteria which surely must be seen as exclusionary in practice. The records I have examined reveal no institutional angst over its exclusionary practices although surely there must have been some in a group so avidly devoted to reflection, to free-thinking and to scholarly debate.

And so I propose tonight an evening of introspection about inclusion and exclusion. Is the Club's exclusion, for example, of women legally or morally justified in 1988?

In short, are we to be thought of -if thought of at all -as an exclusive private club or as a democratic "third- place", an essential hang-out where ideas -not artificial qualifications -prevail? Perhaps we can enter into the discussion heeding the admonition of the bumper sticker I heard about the other day: "Sacred Cows Make Great Hamburgers".