



X Club

Description

The **X Club** was a [dining club](#) of nine men who supported the theories of [natural selection](#) and academic liberalism in [late 19th-century England](#). [Thomas Henry Huxley](#) was the initiator: he called the first meeting for 3 November 1864.^[1] The club met in London once a month—except in July, August and September—from November 1864 until March 1893, and its members are believed to have wielded much influence over scientific thought. The members of the club were [George Busk](#), [Edward Frankland](#), [Thomas Archer Hirst](#), [Joseph Dalton Hooker](#), [Thomas Henry Huxley](#), [John Lubbock](#), [Herbert Spencer](#), [William Spottiswoode](#), and [John Tyndall](#), united by a “devotion to science, pure and free, untrammelled by religious dogmas.”^[2]

The nine men who would compose the X Club already knew each other well. By the 1860s, friendships had turned the group into a [social network](#), and the men often dined and went on holidays together. After [Charles Darwin](#)’s [On the Origin of Species](#) was published in 1859, the men began working together to aid the cause for [naturalism](#) and [natural history](#). They backed the [liberal Anglican](#) movement that emerged in the early 1860s, and both privately and publicly supported the leaders of the movement.

According to its members, the club was originally started to keep friends from drifting apart, and to partake in scientific discussion free from theological influence. A key aim was to reform the [Royal Society](#), with a view to making the practice of science professional. In the 1870s and 1880s, the members of the group became prominent in the [scientific community](#) and some accused the club of having too much power in shaping the scientific landscape of London. The club was terminated in 1893, after depletion by death, and as old age made regular meetings of the surviving members impossible.

Aldous Huxley to George Orwell

Wrightwood. Cal.

21 October, 1949

Dear Mr. Orwell,

It was very kind of you to tell your publishers to send me a copy of your book. It arrived as I was in the midst of a piece of work that required much reading and consulting of references; and since poor sight makes it necessary for me to ration my reading, I had to wait a long time before being able to embark on Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Agreeing with all that the critics have written of it, I need not tell you, yet once more, how fine and how profoundly important the book is. May I speak instead of the thing with which the book deals — the ultimate revolution? The first hints of a philosophy of the ultimate revolution — the revolution which lies beyond politics and economics, and which aims at total subversion of the individual's psychology and physiology — are to be found in the Marquis de Sade, who regarded himself as the continuator, the consummator, of Robespierre and Babeuf. The philosophy of the ruling minority in Nineteen Eighty-Four is a sadism which has been carried to its logical conclusion by going beyond sex and denying it. Whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful. My own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and these ways will resemble those which I described in *Brave New World*. I have had occasion recently to look into the history of animal magnetism and hypnotism, and have been greatly struck by the way in which, for a hundred and fifty years, the world has refused to take serious cognizance of the discoveries of Mesmer, Braid, Esdaile, and the rest.

Partly because of the prevailing materialism and partly because of prevailing respectability, nineteenth-century philosophers and men of science were not willing to investigate the odder facts of psychology for practical men, such as politicians, soldiers and policemen, to apply in the field of government. Thanks to the voluntary ignorance of our fathers, the advent of the ultimate revolution was delayed for five or six generations. Another lucky accident was Freud's inability to hypnotize successfully and his consequent disparagement of hypnotism. This delayed the general application of hypnotism to psychiatry for at least forty years. But now psycho-analysis is being combined with hypnosis; and hypnosis has been made easy and indefinitely extensible through the use of barbiturates, which induce a hypnoid and suggestible state in even the most recalcitrant subjects.

Within the next generation I believe that the world's rulers will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience. In other words, I feel that the nightmare of Nineteen Eighty-Four is destined to modulate into the nightmare of a world having more resemblance to that which I imagined in *Brave New World*. The change will be brought about as a result of a felt need for increased efficiency. Meanwhile, of course, there may be a large scale biological and atomic war — in which case we shall have nightmares of other and scarcely imaginable kinds.

Thank you once again for the book.

Yours sincerely,

Aldous Huxley

Category

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