

Rebellion Dogs blogs & radio: March 2016



Rebellion Dogs Radio # 22 Often wrong but never in doubt: Toronto Intergroup & the Human Rights Tribunal

On Episode #22 of Rebellion Dogs Radio, we are looking at the Toronto situation. It's been all over the blogosphere, it's been in newspapers¹. Intergroups is under the scrutiny of the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal for de-listing agnostic groups. We're going to look at the players involved in this drama and we're going to look at what all of us can do to make AA less divisive and more inclusive.

Here are two versions of Alcoholics Anonymous. Which one do you belong to?

Bill Wilson (letter to Father Ford, May 4, 1957):

*"To begin with, the Steps are not enforceable upon anyone—they are only suggestions. **A belief in the Steps or in God is not in any way requisite for A.A. membership.** Therefore, we have no means of compelling anyone to stay away from A.A. because he does not believe in God or the Twelve Steps. In fact, A.A. has a technique of reducing rebellion among doubting people by deliberately inviting them to disagree with everything we believe in."*

Greater Toronto Area Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

(GTAI) from legal filings February 17, 2016:

*"[7] GTAI, submits that ... its purpose is to practice the 12 steps and practice a belief in God. In order to be part of GTAI, **a group must be prepared to practice the 12 steps and thus the members of the group must have a belief in God.** [9] GTAI also submits that it is a bona fide requirement that groups that wish to be part of this intergroup must have a belief in the higher power of God."*

Rebellion Dog often challenged the assumption that the Twelve Steps are sacred. They can't be both *suggested* and *sacred*, so, according to our literature anyway, the Steps are suggested—not sacred.

For us as individuals, we have 100% freedom. To credit one's sobriety and quality of life to the Twelve Steps and hold them in high regard... go for it; that's natural if you've had a transformative experience. However, to deem AA's Steps as sacrosanct for you, for me and everyone in the room, back off with that rigid talk; you sound downright evangelical. You can see from the two narratives about the Twelve Steps above—opinions vary. Bill Wilson's radical inclusion, Toronto Intergroup's tyranny of the majority; were do you weigh in?

Toronto agnostics, like the 1950s Buddhist groups that Bill is defending in his letter above, feel that any accommodation to include suffering alcoholics is very AA. Is Bill Wilson worried that letting groups take God out of the Steps may one day confuse some newcomer or erode the AA movement?

Toronto Intergroup sees artistic liberty (secular AA) as a sign of the apocalypse. Turning a blind eye on this small cancer will compromise the integrity of the AA message. What if this chaos wasn't contained and led to the end of AA? Is Toronto's new and improved Traditions 2.0 better stewardship or catastrophic thinking?

Both Toronto Intergroup and Toronto agnostic groups see their own hearts as pure and their actions as being in AA's best interests. Both sides see the other as deluded at best, evil at worst. Either way, the other is a threat to AA longevity. How can we break this deadlock? Well I'll be so bold as to suggest that we can and we'll look at how. I promise.

Background:

If you're not up to speed, The Greater Toronto Area A.A. Intergroup is under scrutiny. It turns out that ousting a fellow group on the grounds that it declines to follow your view of a world guided by a sobriety granting, prayer answering God may be against the law. Ontario Canada is governed by the Ontario Human Rights Code. It is against the law in Ontario to discriminate based on certain Human Rights Code grounds. These grounds are race, colour, ancestry, creed, religion, place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, gender (gender identity), sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, disability and being in receipt of public assistance.

Intergroup troubles date back to an event that happened five years ago. Also named in the complaint is A.A. World Services Inc. (AAWS). To Intergroup; these groups were never AA groups in the first place. Their will to be included in AA is misguided. To the agnostic groups, “a desire to stop drinking” is the bond that unites AA members and groups—not obedience to God. Intergroups are service structures, not governing bodies. If agnostic groups want Intergroup’s opinion, they’ll give it to them.



**Ontario
Human Rights Commission**
**Commission ontarienne des
droits de la personne**

Creed doesn’t just include minority religious creeds (Muslims, Hindus, etc.) according to Ontario Law. Atheists, Humanists, Agnostics are also protected under *The Code*.

People have a right to their religion but people who don’t follow the popular creed of an organization (like AA) also have the right to be accommodated. “Duty to accommodate” is a language that we’ll hear during the upcoming hearing.

Right from the Ontario Human Rights Commission website, here’s the basis of duty to accommodate:

The duty to accommodate is comprised of three principles:

1. respect for dignity,
2. individualization, and
3. integration and full participation.ⁱⁱ

The issue, according to Intergroup, is that some Toronto agnostic groups read a secular interpretation of AA’s Twelve Steps in their meeting ritual, display them on their website and in some cases, have them available for distribution. Intergroup contents that groups don’t have the right to read Godless steps and still brand themselves as AA. Only faith-healing AA is sanctioned AA according to Toronto Intergroup—and not faith in the group or the process or door-knobs; we’re talking a Judeo/Christian God.

Why is AA World Service involved? In question is whether or not sitting on their hands and not answering calls to help out violates AA’s fiduciary responsibility to the people of Ontario. AAWS thought, “Not our circus, not our monkey, we have no opinion,” and took no action when rights were allegedly being violated in Toronto. Help was sought but “no opinion on outside issues” was the answer. Is inaction willful blindness and has AAWS broken Ontario law?

Way back in 2011

In 2011 two rights bearing equals in Toronto Intergroup members, We Agnostics (Tuesday Nights) and Beyond Belief Agnostics & Freethinkers Group (Thursdays and Saturdays @ 6:30 PM) were removed from the directory in a close vote. The Intergroup executive further decided that the groups would have no standing (voting or participation) in Intergroup matters. Later, another group, Widening Our Gateway (Sunday Nights) was also removed for the same reason.

For five years, the key defenses for members who favor discriminating against non-believers are:

1. The General Service Bylaws argument (Appendix E of the Service Manual which states that in order to change or modify the Steps or Traditions, agreement of 75% of AA's membership is required). Is this a protection *for* the groups *from* AA's General Service Office (GSO) or a protection *from* the groups *for* GSO? It is not enough to have read our Service Manual. One has to understand it. Speaking from my own experience, when I'm reading to search for validation or confirmation of my own bias, I don't always see the whole truth. That can happen to anyone.
2. "Except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole." The second ½ of Tradition Four. Any number of catastrophic imaginings could lead to a reason to limit group autonomy, or can it? Anyone who points a finger at other groups and claims to be a defender of the Traditions is not understanding the purpose of our Traditions. I don't know how to put this delicately: Part two of Tradition Four is a self-assessment condition for me and my group to review our groups rituals in relationship with the world around us. You and your group ought to ask yourselves if there is anything you're doing that might be harmful or in any way discourteous to fellow groups. NEVER is the second half of the Tradition a caveat for one alcoholic or group of alcoholics to pass judgement on another group. We NEVER reach recovery 2.0 that involves taking someone else's inventory. And have we forgotten; aren't Traditions suggestions—not rules?
3. The purpose of AA is to help the powerless alcoholic find a relationship with a personal God, Yahweh being the only means of arresting alcoholism. While this has been the personal experience of millions of AA members, is Godless AA not AA? Look at the Bill W AA compared to the Toronto Intergroup AA and ask yourself, "Which is too legit to quit?"
4. "Why don't the nonbeliever just start their own fellowship where their atheism won't bother us so much?" No one needs an invitation to start another fellowship. The right to start another fellowship without anyone's permission is so obvious why would anyone say it? Or is this "invitation," just a politer form of bigotry? More importantly isn't divisiveness bad for us? If unity—the principle of our first

Tradition—means anything to us, then the popular groups and the unpopular groups ought to be treated as equals and learn to work together.

In the interest of something resembling brevity, we've looked at both sides of these issues on previous Rebellion Dogs Radio blogs and radio shows. Please visit:

Episode 1 and 13 of Rebellion Dogs Radio for a look at Traditions, Concepts, Bylaws and precedents of the first groups to de-God AAs Steps within the AA framework.

<http://rebelliondogspublishing.com/rebellious-radio>

November 2015 two back to back blogs. One was called New-age AA stewardship: announcing the new Traditions 2.0

The other looks at the Vancouver situation and asks “Do we serve or do we govern?”

<http://rebelliondogspublishing.com/home?p=2>

So, back to the background and then perhaps we can look how two sides might rekindle our common ground.

For five years, agnostic groups negotiated and several well-meaning individuals within Intergroup tried to forge corrective measures. Former Intergroup Executive Chairs and individual Intergroup reps tried many things to make things right. Intergroup remained intolerant and satisfied that tyranny of the majority had God's blessing.

That's when a member named Lawrence filed a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.ⁱⁱⁱ

He is over 20 years sober and waited, like all of us, for AA's self-correcting magic to take hold. After five years no progress had been made. If anything the environment may have grown more poisonous and more dogmatic.

Show respect for the whistle blower

It might be tempting to blame Lawrence, the Toronto member who reported the wrongdoing. That “blame the victim” tendency is easy to rationalize. “AA ought never be drawn into public controversy. How dare he?”

So, did Lawrence commit the crime or did he report the crime? What would we do about rape, homicide or robbery? These things are beyond the scope of a group-conscience. We're not the mob; we're a fellowship. Unresolved conflicts have channels to follow in civilized society. When we think about it, isn't blaming Lawrence for causing controversy in Toronto a wee-bit like blaming Rosa Parks for causing racial tension in America?



President Obama sits in the same seat Rosa Parks refused to vacate 60 years earlier.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to leave a seat in the white section of a Montgomery bus and 60 years later an African American president sits in the White House. Rosa Parks wasn't the agitator; she was the whistle blower. She drew attention to an act of discrimination against her that was both immoral and unconstitutional.

Victim blaming is socially normal—not healthy, but normal. Willful blindness is morally and sometimes criminally wrong, too. Five years is a long time to be patient. Still, if you think Lawrence's actions were rash or self-serving, consider that under our Human Rights Code it's also a *Code* violation to harass a complainant; according to the *Code*, "Persons who make a complaint, as well as anyone else who is involved, should not face negative consequences for taking part in the complaint process. In other words, they should be free from 'reprisal'."

Is Toronto Intergroup the will of the people?

It is hard to tell if Intergroup's actions reflect the feeling of most Toronto AAs because of the woeful attendance at Intergroup's monthly meeting. Participation is less than 20% of eligible groups attending Intergroup at an average meeting. In Bill Wilson's essay on Concept V regarding the relationship between the majority and our minorities, tyranny of the majority can't be blamed on just those that are hasty and hostile. An apathetic majority is also blame worthy.

"Throughout his political speculation De Toqueville insisted that the greatest danger to democracy would always be the "tyranny" of apathetic, self-seeking, uninformed or angry majorities. Only a truly dedicated citizenry, quite willing to

protect and conserve minority rights and opinions, could, he thought, guarantee the existence of a free and democratic society. All around us in the world today we are witnessing the tyranny of majorities and the even worse tyranny of very small minorities invested with absolute power. De Toqueville would have neither, and we A.A.'s can heartily agree with him." *A.A. Service Manual Combined With Twelve Concepts for World Service* by Bill W., p. 22

In a way, this is where AAWS comes in. AA's General Service Office looks at their own feet and mumbles, "It's not our place to govern, to tell either groups or Intergroups what to do. The Toronto situation is a local issue to which we have no official opinion."

No one has been found guilty of any wrong doing at this juncture. Still, with AA's cautiousness about public controversy, what is GSO to do about local disputes? Can they do more? Can we do better?

AA's structure is one to be proud of but that doesn't mean our inverted triangle is perfect. It has its strengths and its weaknesses. *Inverted Trianglism*—according to the law—may not be a license for inaction when someone's rights are being violated. Where does lack of governance start to lack of leadership begin? The balance is personal responsibility—a key to today's theme.

In his 1961 Grapevine essay, "The Dilemma of No Faith," Bill writes, "I had been neither humble nor wise. Boasting of my faith, I had forgotten my ideals. Pride and irresponsibility had taken their place. By so cutting off my own light, I had little to offer my fellow alcoholics. At last I saw why many had gone away—some of them forever."

He was confessing his own pride and irresponsibility. Still thinking about corrective measures, four years later he unveils The Responsibility Declaration. Bill wasn't looking at how to fix AA; he wondered what he could do. This to me is true leadership:

***I Am Responsible.
When anyone, anywhere
reaches out for help,
I want the hand of A.A.
always to be there.***

***And for that,
I Am Responsible!***

Also mindful of responsibility, the Human Rights Code three values—respect, individualization, full participation don't happen to be in conflict with code of “when anyone, anywhere...”.

Here's where AAWS has found that balance and offered leadership in the past. Who remembers GSO's release of SM F-29 on the topic of what “Conference Approved” means and does not mean. It stated clearly that:

“[Conference Approved] does not imply Conference disapproval of other material about A.A. A great deal of literature helpful to alcoholics is published by others, and A.A. does not try to tell any individual member what he or she may or may not read.”^{iv}

So today, it's not just some agnostic group's agnostic Twelve Steps; it's also Back-to-Basics groups reading Wally P's book, daily reflection meetings reading Hazelden, AA, or say, a secular daily reflection book as part of the meeting rituals. These autonomous acts do not dissociate the group from the AA whole or interfere with nearby AA groups. AA does not disapprove of any literature a member or members decide to read.

Toronto isn't unique. Our world is getting more diverse and accommodation is becoming more complex. Maybe there is something GSO can come up with that can act as a guideline for groups and central offices that focused on why our radical inclusion and group liberty are not a threat to AA as a whole.

Just an idea, but just as the “Conference Approved” statement might have silences some squabbles about what books can or can't be read, a similarly designed clarification of Traditions might help keep the peace and show leadership where leadership is being sought.

Meet the Ontario Human Rights Commission

Back to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, they aren't in the business of catching organizations getting it wrong and putting them out of business. They won't tolerate human rights abuses but their mandate is to assist organizations like ours—that is if AA hasn't outgrown coming to believe we need to ask for help. Here's something from the OHRC site:

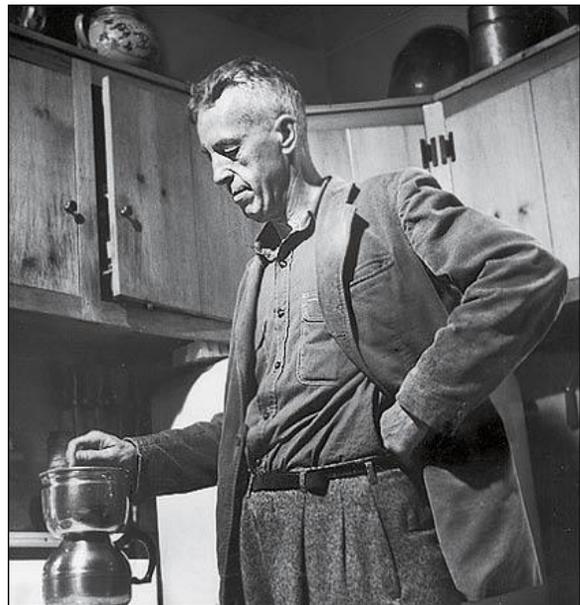
The right to be free from discrimination based on creed reflects core Canadian constitutional values and commitments to a secular, multicultural and democratic society. People who follow a creed, and people who do not, have the right to live in

a society that respects pluralism and human rights and the right to follow different creeds.

“When we ask people to be tolerant of others, we do not ask them to abandon their personal convictions. We merely ask them to respect the rights, values and ways of being of those who may not share those convictions. The belief that others are entitled to equal respect depends, not on the belief that their values are right, but on the belief that they have a claim to equal respect regardless of whether they are right.” – Supreme Court of Canada. 2002^v

GSO could gussy this up in AA language. Nothing here ought to offend open-minded members. After all, isn't this what Bill Wilson was saying? He defended Buddhists groups right to practice AA without God. He didn't for a minute think that this Eastern approach was better. He may have thought that these *savages* would eventually see the value of a personal God in their sobriety and brand of spirituality. But it didn't make a bit of difference to him what the Buddhists did in the future. Here's what he said in response to the 1957 letter quoted in today's opening statement to Father Ford.

“But it certainly can't make the least difference to any of us what the Buddhists do with the Steps. The Steps are for everybody to take or leave alone as they wish, in whole or in part. Had we not taken this attitude it is possible that thousands who are today believing A.A. members and often good Church members, would never have joined up at all. They would have been dead ducks by now.”



On further reflection Bill would say in our Service Manual:

Fortunately, we are not obligated to maintain a government that enforces conformity by inflicting punishment.”^{vi}

“There is a Solution”

The only way back from this conflict is to go back to what works for us AAs: self-examination, refraining from our impulse to judge and control and personal responsibility.

First, why do AA's behave badly? Here's something that makes sense to me—*the narcissism of small differences*. Credit for the term, goes to either Sigmund Freud or Ernest Crawley. Let's just say it's a 100-year-old idea. Let's focus on the light it shines on live in 2016.

We are tribal—that's human nature—and our mojo comes from an understanding of who we are and who we are not. AAs bond over our small differences from other people. We are so much like everyone else but we are bound by common suffering. We can't drink like normal folks. We have to resign from the debating society, we “suddenly found [our]selves saved from death, but still floating upon a perilous sea.”^{vii} So we have similarities on which we can build or re-build a healthy identity.

So we see ourselves as different from *normies* but united in fellowship, us against a formidable foe, alcoholism. Some of relate to how being baseball fans isn't enough, we all have to either be Dodgers or Cubs or Yankee or Blue Jay fans. So we have our tribe and there is the inferior other to rally against. Inside AA we all share a common suffering, but still, we have our women's groups, back-to-basics, young-people's, LGBT, atheist/agnostic groups. We can hone our identity politics to such minute differences that outsiders would not see what makes us so different from the AA whole.

Outside AA, we've seen the Sunnis and the Shiites, Muslims and the Jews, Tutsis and Hutus, all 99% the same and intolerant of the 1% differences. Now it seems like it's AA's turn. Let's get a better understanding of, what seems to some to be chronic uniqueness.



From ArtOfManlienss.com “The Narcissism of Minor Differences” points out:

“...there are two potential problems that grow out of leaning *too heavily* on the narcissism of minor differences: 1) the tendency to define yourself by what you're not, and 2) a focus on trivialities over fundamentals: ... Humans are naturally drawn to conflict, and latching on to minor differences to bolster our sense of self is really just a submerged form of aggression and hostility. Standing out is essentially a competition for status—one that that allows us to feel distinct and superior to others.”^{viii}

So if Intergroup read their local non-theists gatherings as being an act of “aggression and hostility” and the knowledge that these groups read a secular version of the Twelve Steps could appear to be setting themselves apart as “distinct and superior,” then “humans are naturally drawn to conflict.” By reacting to agnostic groups as if they were doing something threatening, Intergroup countered with, what felt to some Intergroup members as, a defensive act of counter-aggression. Being de-listed would naturally fuel any suspicion held by atheist members that maybe their believing brethren saw nonbelievers as second-class AAs.

So let’s look at the key characters in this drama without branding anyone as “victim,” “perpetrator” or “rescuer.” While moderate atheists and believers are polite and/or indifferent to each other, the loudest among us—on both sides—are singing the same song, “Did you see what they did? They’re going to destroy AA if we don’t stop them.”

Each side sees their own actions as loving and the other’s actions as hateful. This isn’t an AA problem; it’s human nature. A team of social-psychologists conducted a study called, “Motive attribution asymmetry for love vs. hate drives intractable conflict.” They studied Israelites and Palestinians in the Middle East and also Republicans and Democrats in the USA.

What happens when the qualities we attribute to actions (even hostile actions) are positive qualities (love) for who we see as the good-guys and negative qualities (hate or insanity) to the same actions taken by the bad-guys? Here’s what the study found:

“An unwillingness to negotiate and unwillingness to vote for compromise solutions.”

Furthermore, researchers concluded that, “Although people find it difficult to explain their adversaries’ actions in terms of love and affiliation, we suggest that recognizing this attributional bias and how to reduce it can contribute to reducing human conflict on a global scale.”

Well that’s a bit of a downer. If AA’s troubles are to last as long as the Middle East conflict, we’re all doomed, not to mention the poor ol’ newcomer. New York Times Best-selling author, Arthur Brooks offers a call to action that I think will ring a bell with all of us. He gives a Ted Talk filmed February 2016^{ix}:

“It’s not good enough just to tolerate people who disagree. It’s not good enough. We have to remember that we need people who disagree with us, because there are people who need all of us...”

Brooks goes on to say:

“It's coming together around these ideas, liberals and conservatives, to help people who need us the most. ... Think about it. Most people are walking around saying, ‘You know, my ideology is based on basic benevolence, I want to help people, but the other guys, they're evil and out to get me.’ You can't progress as a society when you have this kind of asymmetry. It's impossible.”



Asymmetry is the opposite of unity—the principle of our very first Tradition. If it is impossible for a society to progress when one side thinks they are “more worthy AAs” then what do we do? How about letting go?

For those at the one extreme, whereby the one real purpose of AA and the Twelve Steps is unity with God, keep thinking that—maybe you're right—but let go of wanting to control what everyone else think. Trust that God of yours, why don't you; AA's in good hands. Be an example of God's grace—not an evangelist.

For everyone who thinks the Big Book is archaic and we need a new one and dependence on imaginary gods is as bad as alcohol dependency, okay, maybe you're right. But let go of caring about those who find comfort in the first 164 pages of the 80-year-old Big Book. Be an example of a personal relationship with reason—but don't be an evangelist.

If both sides let go of wanting to control and stop obsessing about what the other alcoholics are doing in the other groups maybe we'll all find more time for working with the still suffering alcoholic in our own group. We can't help the newcomer in “their” meeting because we don't go to it.

Narcissism is normal; we all have a sense of self. When it gets out of whack it leads to sociopathy and fascism. That's not why I ought to be suspicious of others; that's why I want to keep my own thoughts and actions in check. While I don't agree with Intergroup, they haven't done anything so extreme that I can't imagine doing or at least thinking

myself. I sometimes have a “save time and see it my way—or else” frame of mind. The contempt I have for others is always a recognition of the shortcomings I struggle with myself.

I don't know if decreasing narcissism and increasing empathy is something an organization can collectively do. I think we each have to mind our own side of the street and hope enough of us are on board. I know it doesn't often help me if you criticize me and tell me I have to be less selfish and think of others more. My knee-jerk reaction will be to rationalize or point the finger back at you. If you're a good example, mind you, I tend to follow.

So there is a solution that works one AA member at a time—it's personal responsibility—doing the best we can one day at a time. We know how remarkable the results can be.

I can be more responsible at minding my own actions at my group and beyond. Bill's Concept V essay warned of the “tyranny” of apathetic, self-seeking, uninformed or angry majorities. Is it for me to point a blaming finger at others or is for me to resist apathy, self-seeking and hasty, reactive actions?

Toronto Intergroup is no different than any other service body. Apathy is fertile ground for corruption and empire-building. If more of us are less apathetic, this is less likely to happen in the future. The personalities are not important. It's the principle. Where have I heard that before?

We can do this because we're always doing this. Being open-minded, trusting the process, making peace with our loved ones, asking how we can help others, this is what we do. We can't control the outcome no matter how much we fuss. Rule 62 reminds me to not take myself too seriously.

So, if we want to show our concern for Toronto Intergroup we ought to go there. If you don't live in Toronto get more involved in your local service structure. If I see rigidity in AA, I ought to counter it by being more accommodating, more open-minded. If I see chaos in AA, I can be the orderly example. Good examples is “attraction rather than promotion” in action. We've all heard that you can't push a string; you have to pull it. That's part of what attraction rather than promotion means to me.

Bill Wilson's Responsibility Declaration is a personal statement. I guess it is hoped that more people take it to heart. It can't be enforced or wished for others to follow. In short, my solution is going back to what we know, personal inventory, service and putting our trust in something greater than just our own will. Let's remember these words found in the pamphlet that explains the process in creating our Twelve Traditions. The best we can

do is ensure that we aren't adding to the problem and be mindful of our own thoughts and actions:

“The way our ‘worthy’ alcoholics have sometimes tried to judge the ‘less worthy’ is, as we look back on it, rather comical. Imagine, if you can, one alcoholic judging another!” *A.A. Tradition: How it Developed by Bill W. (P-17) p.10*

Understanding Toronto Intergroup’s OHRC defense.

This is a hot topic in parts of North America that I’ve been to and around the AA globe over the internet. I often hear, “Why won’t they just admit they are wrong and correct the situation?” Or I hear the blame the victim argument that suggests Lawrence caused the controversy. Everything wasn’t *just fine* before a complaint was lodged.

Something we have to understand is that for Intergroup to decide on the fate of nonbelievers is like two wolves and a sheep voting on what’s for dinner. It looks like democracy in action, but it’s not at all, is it?

In Ontario Canada, the Human Rights Commission doesn’t weigh in on two equals disputing over what the conference should be called or what size font the meeting list should be. They get involved in what we call tyranny of majority or tyranny of minority issues. On the issue of creed, like race or sexual orientation or any case where one side is disadvantaged by being in a minority position, the Commission levels the playing the field. They wouldn’t let either the majority creed impose their beliefs on the minority. Nor would they let the minority creed demand that the majority all change to reflect the minority beliefs.

By law (according to the *Code*), businesses and organizations (including AA) ought to have a human rights policy for members and outsiders to see, plus procedures to internally deal with concerns and/or complaints. This information has been brought to the attention of Intergroup and various delegates and has been, to this point ignored. Back in 2011 a member raised the issue of duty to accommodate (OHRC) and read from the Code. While it was entered in to the minutes in May 2011, it was of little interest to anyone.

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-primer-guide-developing-human-rights-policies-and-procedures>

So because there is concern, I will share what I know as a layperson about what might transpire with this Human Rights hearing.

Lawrence filed a complaint that his rights and dignity were compromised when Toronto Intergroup delisted two groups, including one that he attends.

Toronto Intergroup isn't denying the discrimination. They are seeking an exemption from the Human Rights Tribunal jurisdiction on Section 18 of the Code.

Section 18 seems complicated but it's not. It would allow a Jewish school to overlook another qualified teacher to hire a Jewish teacher to teach their Jewish students. A transgender fraternity could restrict membership. A women's rape crisis center could turn down a request for help from a male rape victim if their mandate is to create a safe environment for women only. In other words, religious, philanthropic, educational, fraternal organizations can discriminate. If AA was a monotheistic religion, we wouldn't have to accommodate Buddhists, humanists, or alcoholics who pray to a deity by a name other than God.

Intergroup is claiming that it (and AA) is a religious organization. Intergroup wants to be excused from Human Rights rules because AA in Toronto only caters to people who believe in God and obey the Twelve Steps (exactly as written).

Here is something that's all over the blogosphere and has been reported in the press. The opening statement was a quote of this blog was from Toronto Intergroup's defense^x being compared to Bill Wilson's vision of AA.

7] The respondent, GTAI, submits that the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) recovery program follows 12 steps and that these steps involve a belief in God. GTAI submits that evidence indicates that its purpose is to practice the 12 steps and practice a belief in God. In order to be part of GTAI, a group must be prepared to practice the 12 steps and thus the members of the group must have a belief in God. GTAI submits that it is not denying the applicant's group the right to form its own intergroup and follow its own process.

[8] GTAI submits that it is a special interest group that is protected, by section 18 of the Code, from a finding that it has breached the applicant's Code rights. Section 18 of the Code states,

Rights ... are not infringed where membership or participation in a religious, philanthropic, educational, fraternal or social institution or organization that is primarily engaged in serving the interests of persons identified by a prohibited ground of discrimination is restricted to persons who are similarly identified.

[9] GTAI also submits that it is a bona fide requirement that groups that wish to be part of this intergroup must have a belief in the higher power of God.

So, what will happen? Intergroup filed this defense in February. About ten days later they announced at the Intergroup meeting that they fired their law firm and were hiring another.

What are the implications if Intergroup loses? What are the implications if Intergroup wins? I asked at the top, which AA is your AA? Is this what Intergroup really believes AA is or have they painted themselves into a corner where pride won't let them concede that maybe they were wrong?

Feel free to visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission website where you can get a feel for how they deal with organizations with asymmetric opinions or worldviews. Here's something right from the site called Section 11:

Section 11 of the Code allows an organization to show that the requirement, qualification or factor that results in discrimination is reasonable and bona fide (legitimate). However, to do this, the organization must first show that the needs of the person (including the needs of the group they belong to) cannot be accommodated without creating undue hardship.

Section 11 Requirements

In some cases, a rule, requirement or qualification that negatively affects people based on their creed may not be discriminatory, or trigger the duty to accommodate, because it is reasonable and bona fide (legitimate) in the circumstances. Some of the factors to consider include whether the standard, requirement or rule:

1. Was adopted for a purpose that is rationally connected to the function being performed?
2. Was adopted in good faith, in the belief that it is necessary to fulfill the purpose or goal
3. Is necessary to accomplish its purpose
 1. Can the organization meet its legitimate objectives in a less discriminatory way that does not create undue hardship?
 2. Were alternative approaches that do not have a discriminatory effect investigated?^{xi}

So will it be asked, "Could Intergroup meet its legitimate objective in a less discriminatory way that does not create undue hardship?"

In Bill Wilson's AA we all mind our own business so our more religious members hold more religious style meetings and our "educational variety" seekers hold more secular meetings. Muckers, muck; atheists doubt; the faithful pray. It works in unity in Bill

Wilson's AA because we're not concerned with what's going on in other groups. We ask ourselves if our group's activities "affect other groups or AA as a whole". We don't point an accusatory finger at others.

April 12th 2016 at noon EST, the Ontario Human Rights Commission is holding a webinar on Creed.

<http://www.hrupa.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment/Pages/Preventing-creed-based-discrimination.aspx>

I don't know exactly what the rules are for registering but I am committed to being better informed and being, as I like to say, a sample of AA rather than an example.

But first...

Today's Rebellion Dogs Radio show was going to be about my visit to the South West. In fact, I won't let the show be hijacked entirely by Toronto drama.

I was honored to be a guest on AfterParty Podcast with Anna David. If you're not a regular reader and listener at AfterParty Magazine, I assure you, that recovery can be funnier, more enriching, more entertaining and more touching than you currently know.

From Hollywood, I drove through the desert to Sedona with Herb, author two books on recovery including *Twelve Steps to Spiritual Awakening: Enlightenment for Everyone*. It was like an 8 ½ hour meeting with a beautiful view.

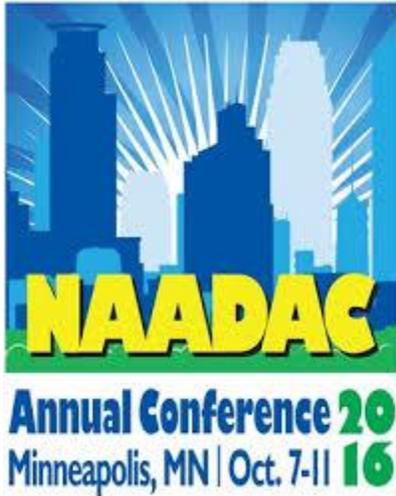
March 4th to 6th, I was back in at Sedona Mago Retreat Center in Arizona for the annual Symposium on AA History. I was one of thirteen presenters and it was an amazing, emotional and educational weekend.

Sunday night in Phoenix I got to visit the local Sunday night agnostics/freethinkers AA group. They are very excited about WAAFTIAAC in Austin November 11 – 13. I am booked and looking forward to it also.

www.RebellionDogsPublishing.com

AfterParty
Magazine
Goodbye chaos, hello calm

Upcoming...



IF you're in the treatment biz and you're going to be at NADAAC 2016 in October in Minneapolis, let me know. I'll be doing a presentation with John McAndrew to treatment professionals. That'll be fun. May do a book signing there too. That's a week in October I'm looking forward to. Maybe see some of you in Minneapolis or in Austin. Hope so

Big Book thumpers and AA critics fall prey to a common stereotype about what defines AA — It's a myth that Alcoholics Anonymous is a program. Yes, there is a program but AA is not a *program*—it is a *fellowship* with a *suggested* program. The characterization of AA as a program is pervasive. We always hear, “How long have you been in the program?” That's the theme of a TheFix.com article by Rebellion Dogs Publishing: Five AA Myths that Critics and Zealots Share^{xii}

I'll close with a little more about the 2016 Symposium on AA History. Last show Episode 21 of Rebellion Dogs Radio featured a talk I gave about the ongoing history of unbelievers. I was very emotional; it was well received. If you haven't had a chance to hear it or see it on Youtube, feel free.

It may inspire some of you to get the collection of presentations. I think it's \$US 20 for all three days worth – the audio and the slides to everything.

Here's the whole program – let's see if that tempts you. I found that there wasn't a slow hour anywhere to be found. Educational, eye opening and for me deeply emotional.

Writers/Researchers, Jay Stinnett and Bill Schabeg hosted the event. Here's a look at the lineup of topics:

FRIDAY

5:30 – 6:30 Dinner

7:00 – 7:15 Welcome and Introductions

Jay S.

7:15 – 8:00 Persistent Urban Legends in A.A.

Dan Carracino (co-director of the documentary film: Bill W.)

8:00 – 8:30 Ernie Kurtz: A Reverence for History

A video interview moderated by William Schaberg & Kevin Hanlon

8:30 – 9:30 Open A.A. Meeting

SATURDAY

6:00 – 7:00 Open A.A. Meeting

with Oxford-Group-style Quiet Time [meditation]

7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast

8:00 – 8:15 An Overview of Our Day

Bill S.

8:15 – 9:00 June, 1945: Bill Wilson Leaves A.A. for a Real Job
Now What Happens?

Kevin Hanlon (co-director of the documentary film: Bill W.)

9:00 – 9:45 “King” Charles Towns of New York City

Gary N.

9:45 – 10:15 Break

10:15– 11:00 A Candid View of the “Lady Lush”: Marty Mann

Dr. Beverly Allen (Professor, Syracuse University: Playwright

[An Evening With Marty Mann: First Lady of Alcoholics Anonymous];

Script Writer [Lady Lush]; Author [Mrs. Marty Mann: First Lady of Alcoholics
Anonymous]

11:00– 12:00 An Interview with Rt. Rev. Ward Ewing

Jay S. & Ward Ewing (non-alcoholic Chair of the General

Service Board from 2002 to 2013; Chair Emeritus thereafter)

12:00 – 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 2:15 Agnostica: Bringing A.A. to the Unbeliever

Joe C. Rebellion Dogs Publishing

2:15 – 2:30 Break

2:30 – 3:15 “In Their Own Words”: The Recovery of
People of Color & LGBTQ in Early A.A.

Jackie B. & Glenn C.

3:15 – 3:30 Break

3:30 – 4:15 Lois Wilson, Her Legacy at Stepping Stones

Sally C. (Executive Director, Stepping Stones, Bedford, NY)

5:30 – 6:30 Dinner

6:45 – 9:00 A Night at the Movies:

Bill W.

[Directors cut extended version]

Followed by a Q&A Session

with Director’s Kevin Hanlon & Dan Carracino

9:00 – 10:00 Open A.A. Meeting

SUNDAY

6:00 – 7:00 Open A.A. Meeting

with Oxford-Group-style Quiet Time [meditation]

7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast

8:00 – 8:15 An Overview of Our Day

Bill S.

8:15 – 9:00 A New Pair of Goggles: The Spread of A.A.

Internationally by the Armed Forces

Roger W.

9:00– 9:45 From Psychic to Psychedelic:

Bill Wilson at the Frontiers of Consciousness

Jay S.

9:45– 10:15 Break

10:15 – 11:00 A Virtual Tour of “Wilson House” in Dorset, Vermont

Julie K. (Executive Director, Wilson House)

11:00 – 11:30 OPEN FORUM: Suggestions for Future Symposiums

Moderators: Jay Stinnett & William Schaberg

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

ⁱ <http://www.torontosun.com/2016/02/19/alcoholics-anonymous-accused-of-discrimination>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/human-rights-and-rental-housing-ontario-background-paper/duty-accommodate>

ⁱⁱⁱ HRTO File Number: 2014-18832-1 Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario February 17, 2016

^{iv} http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/smf-29_en.pdf

^v <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-creed>

^{vi} Wilson, Bill, *The A.A. Service Manual Combined with the Twelve Concepts of World Service*, New York: A.A. World Services, 2015-2016 p 22

^{vii} Anonymous, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, New York: A.A. World Services Inc., 1952-2013, p. 131

^{viii} <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2015/06/02/the-narcissism-of-minor-differences/>

^{ix} http://www.ted.com/talks/arthur_brooks_a_conservative_s_plea_let_s_work_together?language=en

^x Interim decision February 17, 2016 HRTO File Number: 2014-18832-1

^{xi} <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/creed-and-duty-accommodate-checklist-accommodation-providers>

^{xii} <https://www.thefix.com/five-aa-myths-critics-and-zealots-share>