NO ANXIETY ABOUT INFLUENCE

At the prompting of the Chicago Architecture Club, I have been asked to write about influences upon my work. I will refer to four: the Aristotelian / Thomist intellectual tradition of virtue ethics and natural law; the community of baseball; two academic institutions with which I am recently associated; and two e-mail listservs loosely (and unofficially) associated with the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU).

The fact that I am a teacher of architecture is evidence of divine justice if not divine humor, because I have been told (well after the fact) that as a student I was known among my architecture school teachers as a "crit-buster," i.e., difficult, not especially teachable---in short, not a good student. The ancient Roman architectural theorist Vitruvius wrote that a good student of architecture must be both naturally skilled and amenable to instruction; and in retrospect I must acknowledge that what I lacked in skill was gravely compounded by my being in many ways uninstructable. This latter deficiency was due less to my complete ignorance of the culture of architecture at the time of my 1978 matriculation at the University of Virginia then to the fact that my ignorance was compounded by my coming to Virginia with degrees in philosophy and church history. What made me uninstructable was that I found myself being taught not only architecture but philosophy; and since most of my teachers were patently ignorant of philosophy, I came to suspect that they were ignorant of architecture as well. Happily, I was wrong; but I only came to realize this after my formal academic architectural education, when with the additional perspective that only practice can bring I began to slowly integrate these two related but disparate bodies of knowledge.

I am a traditional urbanist, interested vocationally in both doing and teaching architecture in traditional urban contexts. I have always been contemplative and have always admired craftsmanship, and was first attracted to architecture because I understood intuitively that architecture is a wedding of the two. But it is my non-architectural academic background (confirmed by my experience of living in urban neighborhoods in Boston and Chicago) that has caused me to recognize---and to profess---traditional urbanism as the larger context within which to think about architecture. That background, broadly speaking, is the 2500-year-old tradition of Aristotelian / Thomist virtue ethics and natural law theory, historically (and now, in my opinion, unavoidably) linked to biblical religion, dogged in its uncommonly sophisticated defense of philosophical common sense. My allegiance to that tradition makes me in most schools of architecture that most untenurable of all academic architects: a happy participant in and defender of the religious and metaphysical realism of Western Culture.

My primary teachers in that tradition are ancient and modern, pagan, Jewish, Protestant, Orthodox, and (mostly) Roman Catholic. Their names are Aristotle, Benedict, Thomas Aquinas, Alexis de Tocqueville, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Gilbert Chesterton, Peter Berger, Philip Rieff, Aleksandr Solzhenytsen, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Karol Wojtyla (aka Pope John Paul II); and from Tocqueville on they are each one steeped in the reality of the modern world, embracing its accomplishments and its possibilities for good, but nevertheless ultimately critical of modernity's flat and narrow vision.

The depth and breadth of this older intellectual tradition, its contrast to much academic discourse of our own day, and its pertinence to architecture and urbanism are suggested by the tradition's respective views of knowledge, and of ethics and politics. Knowledge originates in the senses conjoined to an active intellect, which on the basis of sense

experience naturally understands things according to type ("type" itself, of course, being—unlike things themselves—an intellectual construct, albeit a necessary one). Knowledge of the world---including the *understanding* known as "science," and the *know-how* known as "art"---and of any particular thing in the world, while never complete, can nevertheless be true; and a rudimentary understanding of something includes knowledge of its efficient, material, formal, and final causes: viz., that *by which* a thing is made, that *out of which* a thing is made, that *into which* a thing is made, and that *for which* a thing is made. If therefore an artist or scientist cannot explain something by means of these fundamental philosophical categories, we have legitimate grounds for questioning his or her knowledge of the subject.

Ethics and politics in this tradition are related to each other, and the subject matter of each is *the good life* for human beings---which itself is related intrinsically to life in a city (*polis*). The good life for any individual human being is the life of moral and intellectual excellence lived in communities---a "community" being any group of persons who pursue a common end. The foremost human community is the city, a "community of communities" the foremost purpose of which is the best life for its citizens. Every city is constituted by overlapping ecological, economic, moral, and formal orders; and it is with the latter order of the city that architects and town planners are primarily though not exclusively concerned.

It should be clear to anyone who knows anything about the state of both contemporary higher education and contemporary architecture that these are *not* the views of knowledge, ethics and politics that currently prevail in either schools of architecture or the architectural profession. "Knowledge" today is always accompanied by quotation marks, and the Aristotelian / Thomist tradition of communal virtue ethics is deemed nostalgic in an individualist culture by definition and evidentially deficient in communitarian enterprises. Nevertheless, undeniable vestiges of this older sensibility remain in the world, if you pause to think and know where to look for them; and one place they remain is in the culture of baseball. The corruption of professional baseball by periodic drug scandals and misplaced corporate business interests notwithstanding, there remains today a discernable "community of baseball;"[1] and baseball parks are its visible architectural symbols. Of these, none is more beloved than Chicago's Wrigley Field [FIGURE 1]. The attraction of Wrigley Field typically is attributed either to nostalgia or to the alleged "authenticity" that it has accumulated over its 92-year history. But I think it is more likely that Wrigley Field appeals because it simply *is* a good place *in* a good place, i.e., because it's a good baseball park in a good neighborhood. Wrigley Field is a specific example of a recognizable though increasingly rare type: a traditional neighborhood ballpark; and a strong case could be made that the neighborhood contributes as much to the character of the ballpark as vice versa. This suggested to me intuitively something with broader implications that I have subsequently pursued not only professionally [FIGURE 2], but also intellectually: that Wrigley's appeal has far less to do with being "of its time" than it has to do with embodying in a particular way tried and tested good urban and architectural types. And this in turn calls into question certain basic assumptions of both contemporary architectural education and contemporary architectural practice.

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[1] Baseball is, I have said elsewhere, like the Catholic Church: divinely inspired, sufficiently simple to be taught to children, sufficiently complex to satisfy the highest intellect, and never entirely free from corruption in either its members or its leadership.

There is considerable evidence that the decay in the contemporary architectural academy is now so pervasive that it is not only heresy but a suicidal career move for junior faculty at most schools of architecture to suggest (from either the Aristotelian / Thomist intellectual tradition or some long tradition of architectural practice) that architecture is an inherently cooperative activity, properly understood as either related to or itself being the art of building with a concern for durability, comfort, beauty, and decorum---i.e., that architecture is a *civic art*, an art literally of and for the city. There are fewer than a handful of the more than one hundred architecture schools in the country where this understanding is both shared by the faculty and coherently embodied within the curriculum; but by the providence of God I have been blessed by association with two of them. One is the Andrews University Division of Architecture, in Berrien Springs, Michigan, about 100 miles east of Chicago, where I taught from 1993-2003; the other is the School of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame, where I currently teach and since January 2004 am the Director of Graduate Studies. Andrews---affiliated with and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist church, a Protestant religious community that participates in but conscientiously locates itself at the margins of secular culture---is elemental, humble and austere in its approach to traditional architecture and urbanism. In contrast, Notre Dame---though it too teaches architecture and urbanism with reference to a similar understanding of the relationship of architecture and urbanism to human well being---is inclined to do so (as we Catholics are wont) in ways both austere and flamboyant; and occasionally with arguably *too* much concern for the opinion of secular culture.

Regardless, the two architecture programs have several things in common in addition to their counter-cultural---more aptly, their *older* cultural---promotion of traditional architecture and urban design. One is that the administrative leadership in both places cares about ideas---about truth---and respects those who do likewise, even in disagreement. A second is that both are communities of intellectual inquiry located in communities of faith. Setting aside the religious beliefs (and agreements and disagreements about such) that are the *raison d'etre* of the larger community within which each of these architecture schools are located, it is noteworthy that the communal *form* of each school is essentially Aristotelian. That is to say: both Andrews and Notre Dame have architecture programs that promote the architect as an ideal character type who would embody certain intellectual and moral virtues directed toward a common good, by means of which the individual architect also achieves his or her own good. Thus, even though there is a long history of architectural patronage within Catholicism, and virtually no historic culture of architecture within Seventh-day Adventism, each school---by its very nature as a genuine community---has inherent affinities for understanding and sympathizing with the fundamental idea that traditional architecture and traditional towns and neighborhoods are the physical forms of community. Hence Andrews' self-characterization (virtually unique among contemporary architecture schools; though perhaps not too far from Notre Dame's self-understanding as well) as a program that

> offers an accredited professional degree emphasizing the craft of building and design for communities, within a context of Christian service. We strive to prepare students to use practical reason and to make good moral and aesthetic judgments in the design of buildings, neighborhoods, and cities.[2]

[2] Andrews University Division of Architecture promotional literature, 2001.

Both schools are better able to pursue their distinctive educational missions by the fact that their faculties are collegial, their respective student bodies small (approximately 250 total students, graduates and undergraduates, at Notre Dame; some 120 undergraduates at Andrews), and their curricula structured toward clearly articulated ends. Though both programs ground architecture in building construction, Andrews focuses more on vernacular building traditions [FIGURE 3] and Notre Dame more on Classical traditions of architectural expression [FIGURE 4]; and both find common cause in traditional urbanism [FIGURES 5-6]. Andrews students graduate with a comparatively "un-theoretical" education compared to Notre Dame graduates, notwithstanding that both are in fact firmly rooted in a theory of architecture as a craft[3] (and notwithstanding that neither exhibit the fancy for arcane "critical theory" characteristic of many other architecture programs); and graduates of both schools come out knowing and caring

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[3] "Craft" in the sense of "skilled artistry" rather than the popular connotation of "hand-made." The most cogent brief discussion of authority, reason, and innovation in the context of a craft tradition of which I know is the following, from Alasdair MacIntyre's 1988 Gifford Lectures subsequently published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition:*

> [S]tandards of achievement within any craft are justified historically. They have emerged from the criticism of their predecessors and they are justified because and insofar as they have remedied the defects and transcended the limitations of those predecessors as guides to excellent achievement within that particular craft. Every craft is informed by some conception of a finally perfected work which serves as the shared *telos* ["end" or "purpose"] of that craft. And what are actually produced as the best judgments or actions or objects so far are judged so because they stand in some determinate relationship to that *telos*.... So it is within forms of intellectual enquiry, whether theoretical or practical, which issue at any particular stage in their history in types of judgment and activity which are rationally justified as the best so far....
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> [R]easoning within a craft [tradition therefore]…differs strikingly from [the reasoning] of [modern rationalists]. The [modern rationalist] aims at providing timeless, universal, and objective truths as his or her conclusions, but aspires to do so by reasoning which has from the outset the same properties. From the outset all reasoning must be such as would be compelling to any fully rational person whatsoever. Rationality, like truth, is independent of time, place, and historical circumstances…. What [this] view entails is *an exclusion of tradition as a guide to truth* [emphasis added]….
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> By contrast, just because at any particular moment the rationality of a craft is justified by its history so far…[to] share in the rationality of a craft requires sharing in the contingencies of its history, understanding its story as one's own, and finding a place for oneself as a character in the enacted dramatic narrative which is that story so far. The participant in a craft is rational *qua* participant insofar as he or she conforms to the best standards of reason discovered so far, and the rationality in which he or she thus shares is always, therefore---unlike the rationality of the [modernist] mode---understood as a historically situated rationality, even if one which aims at a timeless formulation of its own standards which would be their final and perfected form through a series of successive reformulations, past and yet to come.
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> *The authority of a master within a craft is both more and other than a matter of exemplifying the best standards so far. It is also and most importantly a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others towards going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past to move towards the* telos *of fully perfected work* [emphasis added]. It is in thus knowing how to link past and future that those with authority are able to draw upon tradition, to interpret and reinterpret it, so that its directedness towards the telos of that particular craft becomes apparent in new and characteristically unexpected ways. And it is by the ability to teach others how to learn this type of "knowing-how" that the power of the master within the community of a craft is legitimated as rational authority.

about how buildings are put together, and understanding the difference between a foreground building and a background building and the place of each in the city.

Is it an accident that academic architectural programs of this type are located in religious institutions at the margin of the contemporary culture of architecture and architectural education, and their work appreciated more by the lay public than by the profession? I think not; but who knows? And who knows what impact Notre Dame and Andrews graduates will eventually have upon architecture and urbanism? At the present time however, the Congress for the New Urbanism (which largely bypasses the contemporary culture of academic architecture, though not for lack of trying to engage it) is shooting straight for the heart of the contemporary building culture by first challenging and then engaging and converting the public officials, legislators, planners, traffic engineers, bankers, developers and homebuilding industry executives who together are primarily responsible for new building being done today in the United States---almost all of which is in the form of sprawl development, and almost all of which is done with minimal or no assistance from architects.

This is not the place to rebut the litany of false charges hurled repeatedly at the New Urbanists from the increasingly isolated compounds of academic architecture; nor would there be any point in defending every detail of every project done under the New Urbanist umbrella. But it is the place to mention my active participation over the last decade on several New Urbanism-related listservs, an involvement in a contentious and cooperative cyber-community that has also led to my expanded involvement in several "meat-world" communities. But even aside from the friendships and professional opportunities [FIGURES 7-9] that have followed that participation, what these wide-ranging conversations have also driven home to me is the basic intellectual and cultural seriousness of the New Urbanist enterprise. Not only is New Urbanism itself an internally contentious communitarian movement pursuing communitarian objectives; they are also the only folks around with a coherent alternative to sprawl development. New Urbanists are relentlessly (if selectively) self-critical in subjecting their theories to both the literal marketplace and the marketplace of ideas, correcting and refining their theories and practices toward the renewal and improvement of traditional town and urban neighborhood life. And whether they know it or not---and some of them do---the philosophical and anthropological assumptions of the New Urbanists are at least implicitly Aristotelian, and therefore represent an important counter-gesture to our ruinously individualist culture, of which both suburban sprawl and contemporary architecture are manifest physical expressions.

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