Metaphysical Realism, Modernity, and Traditional Cultures of Building

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Philip Bess is an architectural and urbanist visionary, with ambitions of impressive and inspiring scope. If Le Corbusier and other architectural modernists sought to adapt architecture to the machine age, Bess seeks to go in the other direction: to put forward ideas for urban design and reconstruction that adapt the machine to the human person—and not merely to modernity's impoverished understanding of the human person, but to the understanding put forward by the most penetrating philosophical critics of modernity, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, and by the longer philosophical traditions of metaphysical realism which they seek to recover. His essay makes an ideal companion piece, and debating partner, for Witold Rybczynski's reflections in the previous essay. While Rybczynski cautions against urbanist ideas that fail to take their bearings from people as they are, Bess insists that only by rethinking the built environment entirely, and grounding that rethinking in a deeper philosophical understanding of human nature, can the human prospect be improved and a sustainable future be created. They provide contrasting ways of understanding the centrality of place and place-making in urban design.

I TEACH TRADITIONAL architecture and urbanism at a school where my colleagues and I generally agree that good traditional architecture and good urbanism are genuine human goods, and that genuine human flourishing is a primary end of traditional architecture and urbanism. The previous assertions are meaningless unless human flourishing has substantive content, and one of my vocational mandates is to introduce students to a long Western cultural tradition most often associated with Aristotle that the best life for individual human beings is a life of moral and intellectual excellence lived in community with others, and most typically in a town or city neighborhood—that is, in a finite and generally bounded place with some degree of geographic character and specificity. I contend here that this understanding of both human well-being and the kinds of places that support human well-being has been and is undermined by modernity, in ways I will describe at greater length in what follows. And yet we are all moderns, and modernity does bring with it certain genuine human goods, most notably in the realms of health and wealth as measured even crudely by increases in life expectancy and per capita income of persons who live in modern societies. So although a worldview that supports the understanding of architecture, urbanism, and human well-being that my colleagues and I teach is in certain necessary respects a *counter-proposal* to modernity, what we teach ought not to entail or imply a complete rejection of modernity but rather should be a worldview that both embraces modernity's genuine goods and seeks when and where possible to ameliorate modernity's inherent errors—not least modernity's errors regarding both human habitat and human flourishing. Articulating such a worldview, and fighting for the kinds of places it engenders and the understanding of human flourishing it promotes, is a long-term cultural project. The agents of such a project have yet to fully reveal themselves, and have yet to fully emerge.

Let me hypothesize that modern human beings need a renewed *culture of building*, a communal enterprise that includes architects,

skilled artisans, patrons, founders, developers, and financiers. And let me hypothesize further that we need a renewed culture of building for the sake of our individual and communal and trans-generational flourishing; and that for the sake of human flourishing human beings should make walkable mixed-use settlements of streets and squares and foreground buildings and background buildings; and should make buildings that are durable, comfortable, beautiful, and with a sense of decorum suited to the building task at hand.

How can this hypothesis possibly be true, when the contemporary culture of building, when modern culture itself, when so many prominent institutions and so many aspects of our own lives as individuals, all seem to deny it? When the way we live so often emphasizes motion rather than calm, mobility rather than place, the disposable over the durable, the temporal over the eternal, novelty over beauty? Consider dynamic fields of modern achievement for the pre-modern practices of which few of us do or should long: medicine, sanitation engineering, aeronautics, communication media, and information technology. All these fields are *apparently* modern in a way that traditional building and traditional urbanism *apparently* are not. Is this an intellectual and existential contradiction? Persons who on the one hand are modern, and who on the other hand seek to build traditional buildings and cities: are such persons living incoherent and contradictory lives, necessarily guilty of thoughtless and irrational nostalgia? This is what many critics of traditional architecture and urbanism would have us believe. But the critics are wrong, and their own criticisms are intellectually problematic. Because if we look closely, we can recognize that each of these apparently disparate modern practices I have cited has something in common. What unites them is that the respective practitioners of each have a more or less clear, shared, and reasonable understanding of the nature and purpose of what they practice, and of the end or good that the practice seeks—what the ancient Greeks called the practice's *telos*. Such, alas, is not the case in our contemporary culture of architecture and building, where there is no such clear,

shared, and reasonable understanding of the *telos* of architecture and urbanism. Where once there was both theoretical and practical agreement that buildings should be durable, comfortable, beautiful, and related to each other in a proper hierarchical order, today we build everyday buildings for short-term economic gain, and monumental buildings as exercises in novelty, self-expression, and advertising. The cumulative result is our contemporary built environment of junk and bewilderment—though none responsible for it will admit that this junky bewildering environment is their intent, or argue that it represents a shared purpose, or contend that it is reasonable. But perhaps we have this built environment precisely because we *lack* a shared and reasonable understanding of the nature and purpose of architecture and building. And perhaps we lack a shared and reasonable understanding of architecture and building because we lack a shared and reasonable understanding of the nature of reality.

A SHARED VIEW OF REALITY

Grant me for the moment that traditional architecture and urbanism are more durable, more culturally and environmentally sustainable, more beautiful, and (in the long run) more economical than modern architecture and urbanism—in other words, that given certain premises there are rational reasons to make traditional architecture and urbanism. If this is true, why do we no longer make traditional architecture and urbanism? Let me suggest that we no longer make traditional architecture and urbanism because a precondition of making them is a shared metaphysical realist view of the world embodied and transmitted by institutions—and this is precisely what is lacking in modernity.

But what exactly do I mean by modernity? And what do I mean by metaphysical realism, and that we have lost it? To take the second question first—and at the risk of outraging professional philosophers—let me summarize the basic tenets of metaphysical realism as follows:

1. The world is real, and reality is what it is and is fundamentally sacred;

2. It is possible for human beings to have true knowledge of the world, with this qualification: that all true human knowledge is necessarily partial, individually and collectively perspectival, and mediated to us through narrative traditions; and

3. Human beings can only flourish by conforming ourselves to reality, but again with a qualification: that as artisans, human beings order found reality into a specific human reality that, so long as it accords with and participates in the larger reality of which human beings are part, enables us to flourish both individually and collectively.

These three tenets are fundamental to metaphysical realism; and I don't think it too much to say that all or virtually all pre-modern cultures have operated, if often only implicitly, with *at least* these three primary "common sense" metaphysical realist assumptions: that the world is real, that we can know the world truly, and that we flourish by conforming ourselves to reality truly understood.

From these three tenets a number of implications and associated intellectual challenges follow:

- One is the intellectual challenge of discerning and articulating how the many different parts of reality relate to the whole of reality. Addressing this question of the relationship of parts to the whole is a historic function of religion, science, and philosophy, and is also *the* classic enterprise of the university as a historical institution.

- A second implication is the challenge to understand the distinctive nature of things, both in terms of their *telos* and in terms of what they are and are not capable of being and doing. With respect to human flourishing and the relative importance or unimpor-

tance of good places toward that end, we need to understand the nature of human beings: as animals, as social beings, as artisans, as actors, and as thinkers who order, intend, and symbolize; we need to understand the nature of material things and their properties; and we need to understand the nature of architecture and of cities as artifacts made by embodied social beings who endow their artifacts with symbolic meaning.

- A third implication is the significance of saying that human beings flourish by conforming ourselves to reality—that is, human beings have a *telos*, which is to live well. As Alasdair MacIntyre noted in *After Virtue*, in pre-modern/metaphysical-realist cultures "living well" is the *telos* of a human being in the same way that farming well is the *telos* of a farmer, and keeping time well is the *telos* of a clock.[1]

So what do I mean by *modernity*? The modern world derives its distinctive characteristics from the transformation of traditional societies initiated by the rise of modern industrial capitalism in mid-eighteenth-century Protestant Europe and America, which was itself preceded by some 250 to 300 years of witting and unwitting cultural spadework in religion, art, science, commerce, and colonization. One consequence of the rise of industrial capitalism—epitomized by Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, and today *de rigueur*—has been an acute and increasingly sophisticated attention to economic behavior, indeed to economic interest seen as not only *a* determinant of human action but in many modern theories as *the* determinant of human action. More recently, particularly in modern societies that have been most economically successful, environmental concerns have come to be regarded as a necessary constraint upon human economic activity; but economics arguably remains the primary lens through which moderns continue to understand collective social behavior, not least with regard to how we make and inhabit the built environment.

There is a plausible and partially true narrative of modern indus-

trial capitalism and the global economy—one of which globalists are especially fond—that identifies capitalism as an economic system proper to free beings, one that especially rewards certain kinds of entrepreneurial character virtues, and one that is to be admired not least for its unprecedented record of success in increasing both human life expectancy and per capita income in every corner of the globe in which it holds sway. And there is an opposing narrative of modern industrial capitalism, also plausible and partially true, perhaps presented with greatest rhetorical power in one of its earliest historical formulations, *The Communist Manifesto*, in thunderous words that reverberate to the present day:

> [S]ince the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, [the bourgeoisie has] conquered for itself . . . exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. . . . The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand . . . has pitilessly torn asunder [all human] ties . . . and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest. . . . The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers. . . . The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production. . . . [U]ninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch. . . . All [fixed relations] are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned. . . . The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the

> world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. . . . [By] the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, [it] draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.[2]

And as a kind of coda to this analysis come these words from American farmer and man of letters Wendell Berry:

> If you are dependent on people who do not know you, who control the value of your necessities, you are not free, and you are not safe.[3]

These competing narratives about the merits of modernity notwithstanding, until about the last 130 years or so modern culture itself has operated with metaphysical-realist assumptions. Modern science for example, for I hope obvious reasons, is incoherent without the metaphysical-realist tenets that the world is real and can be known truly; and even more so is modern democratic political theory—"all men are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights"—incoherent without metaphysical-realist assumptions.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

Nevertheless, modern culture has clearly ceased to be metaphysically realist. How has this happened? I raise the question because, however keen our intellectual insights, we are all moderns now, not least

(indeed perhaps most especially) in our habits of thinking, living in a world shaped by modern institutions (most notably, technological production, bureaucracy, and modern communications media); and because I think the recovery of good human communities generally and good towns and neighborhoods in particular may prove much harder than many of us imagine. The answer to my question lies I think in a too-little-considered distinctive feature of modern life: In a way unprecedented in human history, modernity has sharply divided public life from private life. Personal identity and public roles were much more closely wed in pre-modern than in modern societies, with the result that pre-modern societies were more "simple" and less "alienating" than modern societies or, alternatively, more "restrictive" and less "free"—but in either account, less characterized by the anxiety or the pleasure of the multiple opportunities for individual choice afforded by modernity. The modern creation of a private realm is thus both a consequence and a further precipitating cause of the breakdown of religion as a shared teleological understanding of the cosmos encompassing both is and ought, facts and values; and the modern relegation of "values" to the private realm both engenders and reinforces pluralism, relativism, and individualism, especially in morals, religion, and the arts. Moreover, the rise of the so-called autonomous individual has affinities with the transformation of the university, once understood as a community exploring different facets of a universe commonly understood. The modern university, in contrast, is all about disciplinary specialty and expertise—"all trees and no forest," some wag has said—and to the extent that modern research universities dance to the piper of their modern commercial and governmental *padroni*, there is even less incentive and opportunity for persons in different academic disciplines to join together in disinterested explorations of how their respective disciplines may relate to each other and be understood as aspects of a larger shared pursuit of a true understanding of the universe. Nor in such a cultural milieu should it come as a surprise that what our elite architectural schools teach

to young architects becomes increasingly incomprehensible to non-architects.

How did this division of public and private life come about? Since the middle of the eighteenth century—with antecedent influences—modern institutional life has been increasingly shaped by the instrumental rationality of technological production and bureaucratic organization. Institutions are artifacts shaped by persons who have themselves been shaped by institutions, *ad infinitum*; but successful institutions become so by producing the personality types they need, and the institutions of the modern economy have been so successful that the Scientist–Technician and the Bureaucrat–Manager have emerged as primary character types of modern institutional culture and, indeed, the modern world. Why? Because such characters represent in their person (but alas only within their narrow realm) efficiency, economy, accountability, predictability, and repeatability, character traits essential to the operation and management not only of modern business institutions such as factories but of any institution, commercial or governmental, seeking to efficiently organize a large scale operation. And it is this search for organizational efficiency that is what Max Weber was referring to when he wrote that the modern world is characterized by the triumph of rational authority—by which he meant instrumental rationality embodied in the persons of technicians and bureaucrats—over the authority of traditions.[4]

Modernity effectively separated economically productive work from the home. A primary consequence of this has been that at the same time life in the public realm has come to be organized according to an expanding bureaucratic rationality, it is (ironically) the organization of life *outside* the world of work that more and more has become a *laissez-faire* operation. Most strikingly, modernity has led to the rise of and belief in an allegedly autonomous individual self—a paradoxically modern superstition, because even apart from common sense, the idea of an autonomous self (articulated classically in seventeenth-century "social-contract" theory by, as Bertrand de Jouvenal put it, "childless men

who must have forgotten their own childhood"[5]) is contrary to just about everything we know about human beings both from pre-modern societies *and* from modern anthropology and sociology. The modern world has developed a private arena of "freedom" celebrated as "choice"; but this is perhaps more aptly characterized as an arena that not only *allows* a variety of "lifestyle" choices but also *requires* such choices. So modern institutional life, on the one hand, is organized to serve most effectively the demands of the modern economy, in which control and predictability are paramount; and modern private life, on the other hand, is organized around the maximization of individual freedom under the rubric of consumerism, choice, and ultimately self-creation. Thus where the bureaucratically organized economic and governmental institutions of modern life and their rules are comparatively strong, the authority of institutions that in the past have organized human life in its non-economic aspects lived away from work are significantly weaker—three obvious examples being the Family for sexuality and child-rearing, and the University and the Church for knowledge and shared cosmic meaning. But just as the modern world developed the Scientist–Technician and the Bureaucrat–Manager as distinctive modern character types for the comparatively "hard" world of work, so likewise have the Artist and the Therapist emerged as distinctive modern character types for the creativity and the coping required, respectively, by modernity's creation of the autonomous individual in the comparatively "soft" realm of private life and choice.

The creation of these new modern character types registers itself in the material and spatial expressions of modernity. Where once Church and Town Hall and Courthouse and Public Square most prominently defined the cityscape, the modern era has produced a cityscape occupied most prominently by the Factory, the Office Building, the Museum, the Hospital and the Freeway—the habitats, respectively, of those distinctively modern character types the Technician, the Bureaucrat, the Artist and the Therapist, all mobilized to pursue as efficiently as possible their various lifestyle choices. And this brings us to Bess's Law of Architecture and Urbanism, and its Corollary. The Law is:

> Architecture always symbolizes power, and aspires to symbolize legitimate authority.

and the Corollary is:

> A widespread desire for and expectation of social predictability from everyone else—the culture of bureaucracy—combined with a widespread desire for and expectation of maximum freedom for oneself—the culture of personal autonomy—will never produce a beautiful, coherent, and intelligible public realm.

In tandem with the technological achievements that modernity has made possible, which have resulted in an almost infinitely complex global economy professedly oriented to individual consumer choice, I think this law and its corollary explain much of the character of modern architecture and urbanism, and how and why modern architecture and urbanism differ from traditional architecture and urbanism. What are some of these differences? Most succinctly, the essential differences are these: (a) in traditional buildings the *enclosure* of the building and the *structure* of the building are identical, and in modern architecture they are not; and (b) traditional urbanism is *spatial*, and modern cities and suburbs are not.

THE FORM OF THE CITY

To elaborate—and if only to contravene our own modern habit of viewing buildings as isolated objects—let me begin with urbanism and then move to architecture. Because of our common modern tendency to understand urbanism primarily in terms of economic exchanges and lifestyle choices, I want to begin with a characterization of urbanism that I contend is true of all cities, modern and pre-modern, large and small.

It goes like this: Whatever else a city is, it is constituted by five conceptually different orders that exist in dynamic and reciprocal

relationship with each other. A city is always and everywhere and simultaneously an *environmental* order, a *demographic* order, an *economic* order, a *moral* order, and a physical/spatial *formal* order. These orders may be better or worse, and they may be more or less recognized and acknowledged; but they are always present, and always in play, in cities ancient and modern. But there are also differences between traditional cities and modern cities, and perhaps the most fundamental difference between them is that inhabitants of traditional cities generally understood themselves and their cities to be grounded in sacred order; whereas inhabitants of modern cities understand (correctly) their cities and suburbs to be expressions of corporate and individual will-to-power, though these are usually described as "market forces" and "individual choice." What are the physical and formal features that denote these two different understandings of cities?

Let me begin with traditional urbanism, by which I mean in the most general sense walkable settlements characterized by the pedestrian proximity of a variety of uses and activities accessible to human beings of virtually all ages. One elementary and recurring characteristic of traditional urbanism is the mix of uses that exist within a distance of a quarter-to-half-mile—a five-to-ten-minute walk for most human beings. Because of its relationship to the human body, the walkable mixed-use neighborhood is the fundamental unit of traditional towns and cities. A neighborhood or two standing alone constitutes a village or small town, while an accumulation of neighborhoods constitutes a larger or smaller city. In the latter case (in architect Léon Krier's memorable image[6]), a neighborhood is to a city as a slice of pizza is to the whole pie: a part that contains the same essential ingredients as the whole. In contrast, a post-1945 suburb separates all the "ingredients" of everyday life into allegedly functional zones, inaccessible to pedestrians. In addition, traditional urban settlements are hierarchical in form, characterized by a reciprocal relationship between public spaces and the more prominent religious and civic "foreground" buildings, and the less prominent domestic and commercial

"background" buildings—which when assembled altogether become traditional urbanism in the form of both towns and cities.

I have been referring to public spaces, and the importance of space in traditional urban environments. The traditional city is above all a spatial environment, and the idea of urban space is not at all ethereal or "spiritual" or slippery. In traditional urban settlements, space is not a void without form, but rather its opposite. Traditional urban space is a void *with* definite form, something with breadth and depth, with limits, with figure. Moreover, space can be *con*figured. Space is an artifact, something that human beings can and do make. Shaped space is where much of what is most important in human social life takes place, whether in the intimate space of a private room or in the public space of a street or a plaza. The point I want to emphasize here is that, historically, space has been a product of and container for human communal sociability, and is the medium of traditional face-to-face urban culture and civil society.

As early as 1840 Alexis de Tocqueville saw and began to articulate that modern democracy has an inherent tendency to promote the phenomenon not of selfishness but of individualism.[7] What Tocqueville long ago recognized as American individualist culture in potential is today American individualist culture realized; and with respect to the built environment, modern individualism finds physical expression in at least two ways, one elite and one popular. Elite individualist expression can be seen in the buildings of the small but highly publicized world of avant-garde architecture, the domain of The Artist, the aspiring symbolic content of whose work is to legitimate freedom to live an experimental life as an authoritative cultural ideal. But the most popular and pervasive physical expression of contemporary individualist culture is the post-WWII American suburb, which manifests the ideal of a freestanding house in the natural landscape. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this ideal, and it actually has a long history in Western culture; but until the eighteenth century it was pretty much an exclusively aristocratic ideal, valued typically as a temporary respite from urban life. However, when that ideal became

democratized in the modern era *in opposition to* the Industrial City, it set off a series of historical events the result of which is not an agricultural landscape dotted with grand or modest villas, but rather a "middle landscape," neither rural nor urban, that practically everywhere looks like contemporary Long Island, New Jersey, and suburban Atlanta. Such automobile suburbs are what Americans since 1945 have been building almost exclusively, and exporting to the rest of the world—and are correctly understood as a physical embodiment of the inherent democratic cultural tendency toward individualism identified by Tocqueville, one made materially possible by government policies and the proliferation of the automobile. The post-1945 suburb is a world of unprecedented private luxury that is simultaneously and strikingly a world of unprecedented public spatial poverty, literally an *anti-spatial* environment, a world in which *the public realm doesn't matter*. In contrast, space is the medium of traditional urban life; it is where most of public life in traditional (pre-1930) cities takes place. And by "traditional urban life" I mean not only the dense historic urban center habitat happily consumed (but generally not produced) by today's postmodern cosmopolites, but also the traditional working-class city neighborhood and traditional small-town habitats of Front Porch Republicans. Space in these places is not a vague or amorphous concept: rather, urban space denotes a class of things possessing specific names that denote a variety of spatial types: public urban spaces such as the *park*, the *plaza*, the *square*, the *boulevard*, the *avenue*, the *street*, and the *alley*; and private and semi-private urban spaces such as the *courtyard* and the *cloister garden*, as well as the transitional *forecourt*—traditional urban spaces all.

If the most obvious formal difference between the traditional city and the modern city is the difference between a spatial environment and an anti-spatial environment, the fundamental difference between traditional buildings and modern buildings concerns their materials and methods of construction and their corresponding durability (or lack thereof). Buildings in pre-modern societies for the most part were made with materials locally available and locally produced. These were

low embodied energy materials, in several ways: (1) in terms of their inherent properties as materials drawn from the earth and in need of relatively little refinement; (2) in terms of the relative ease with which they were acquired, prepared for use in buildings, and employed in the building construction process; (3) in terms of the energy required to transport them from their point of origin and manufacture to the building site; and (4) in terms of the energy required to repair and maintain them over time. In addition, as I noted earlier, traditional buildings more than modern buildings are characterized by an integral relationship between structure and enclosure. To put this most simply: in contrast to most modern construction, the walls of a traditional building also hold the building up. Prior to the modern era, admittedly under conditions of scarcity and lacking mechanized means of transportation, human beings typically made buildings characterized by the *identity* of structure and enclosure: the exterior walls of the building were also part of the structure of the building, typically mud, bricks, blocks or stones piled up on one another in compression. In contrast, standard practice in today's construction industry is for exterior walls to fill between and/or be attached to a building's steel or concrete structural frame (or its diaphragm of wood or steel studs), a practice generally not as durable as traditional construction because the building's component parts are not integral. This lack of integration makes buildings more vulnerable to water penetration and ultimate deterioration over time as their unintegrated components expand and contract during seasonal freeze-thaw cycles. (Such buildings are especially vulnerable if they have a flat roof anywhere but in arid climates.) Moreover, again in contrast to traditional construction, most modern construction employs comparatively *high-embodied energy* materials that are, for now, still relatively easy and inexpensive to manufacture and transport in an era of cheap energy. How long that can continue remains to be seen; but the facts are that traditional construction both employs lower embodied energy materials than modern construction and is generally more durable than modern construction. Stones artfully piled atop one another will

stand a thousand years or more with minimal regular maintenance. Today's modern architectural *tours de force* are lasting a generation or less before requiring expensive maintenance and repair.

ARCHITECTURE, TRADITION, AND FREEDOM

I hope by this point I have made the case for how and why it is that traditional urbanism necessarily operates with metaphysical-realist assumptions, and how modern architecture, modern urbanism, and the modern suburb require a subjective, relativist, and individualist view of cities and human beings and a utilitarian and will-to-power view of both ethics and political authority. This suggests that we can maintain the modernist architectural and urban/suburban project so long as the economic and political forms of modernity themselves can be maintained. But can these forms of modernity in fact be maintained? There is much talk today about the environmental sustainability of modernity, but that is not the only question and type of sustainability with which moderns are confronted. Is modernity economically sustainable? Is modernity culturally sustainable?

If metaphysical realists are correct, *no* human culture is sustainable that does not acknowledge the constraints that reality imposes upon it. So another question that arguably needs to be asked is this: What living traditions of life and thought in the modern world presume and promote metaphysical realism? (The only alternative to this line of inquiry for would-be metaphysical realists seems to me to attempt to recover metaphysical realism on one's own, as an individual project—which strikes me as possible in theory, but much more difficult than recovering, adapting, and extending older traditions of thought and practice.) In the West, the oldest intellectual traditions of metaphysical realism are classical culture and Biblical religion (Jewish and Christian), worldviews that encompass facts (and *eo ipso* science), values, teleology, *and* a degree of sophistication about how cultures develop toward their *telos* over time. Biblical religion in the modern world has assuredly *not* been immune to transformation

(and degradation) by modern culture. But to the extent that classical culture remains a living tradition in the modern world, it is mediated to us by Biblical religion; and Biblical religion remains a living intellectual tradition in which otherwise relativist moderns might discover a retrievable metaphysical realism.

Let me therefore conclude with a hypothesis: *If* traditional architecture and urbanism have a future, it will be for one or both of two reasons: (1) historical circumstances will force them upon us; or (2) communities of persons will choose them in acts of intentional self-limitation. So, are there examples of communities and institutions that, however haltingly and however imperfectly, are actually pursuing traditional architecture and urbanism? It so happens that at the moment there are several. Thomas Aquinas College dedicated its new campus chapel just a few years ago, a skillfully executed classical basilican church plan informed by Palladian and California Mission Style traditions. Notre Dame, Andrews University, Judson University, and the University of Miami all have schools of architecture that teach traditional urban design. In the United Kingdom, the Prince's Foundation for Building Community promotes traditional architecture and urbanism through a number of programs and ancillary institutions. And then there are classic Tocquevillian associations in the United States, such as the Congress for the New Urbanism, the Institute for Classical Architecture and Art, and the American College of the Building Arts, all of which do splendid educational and professional work promoting traditional urbanism and/or traditional architecture and construction. However, every one of these institutions has been created by persons who have been trained as modernists. Their leaders are autodidacts who have undertaken, voluntarily and mostly on their own, the recovery of their respective traditions, and who eventually found one another. And poignantly, every one of these institutions is facing the unavoidable modern challenge of how the traditions they have begun to recover can be sustained and handed over to the next generation.

One last consideration: where does human freedom as both a fact and a genuine good come into play in these scenarios for the future

of traditional architecture and urbanism? I confess to a traditional American—indeed a Catholic Christian—regard for liberty as a great human good, and a respect for the freedom and moral necessity of individuals to choose the good. I therefore think we should teach our children by example the existential benefits of stability of life, of choosing to stay put in a place, but at the same time insist that we must allow and not disparage or obstruct the freedom of individuals to pursue their vocation—in the full theological sense of the term—wherever it leads them. I therefore continue to look to the paradigmatic characters to whom I have looked for many years: St. Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Western communal monasticism; and Alexis de Tocqueville, the chronicler and theorist of communities of virtue formed by free citizens. Traditional urbanism is a genuine good, but good governments provide incentives for free citizens to choose the good rather than forcing them to do so, except under the most dire circumstances when all are required to sacrifice. Such dire circumstances may well be approaching, but in the interim my sense is that the challenge for those of us who promote traditional architecture and urbanism as genuine goods is to persuade individuals and communities of the benefits of stability of life; to model it ourselves; to make it so attractive that it will draw others to it; and to once again build durable and beautiful environments in which persons born into or drawn to them can flourish over the course of their individual lives, and the community itself can flourish over the course of multiple generations.