THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMUNITY AND THE *POLIS*: THINKING ABOUT ENDS, PREMISES, AND ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Historically, architecture has had multiple ends, and these ends often exist in tension. One end of architecture, long prominent, has been defined with reference to communities, specifically to the buildings commissioned by communities. In the architecture commissioned by religious or political or artistic or athletic communities, architects have understood themselves to have a primary obligation to address the variety of practical and formal issues important to their patrons---and I would argue that addressing the concerns of patrons (including the formal concerns of patrons) is a pragmatic duty not superfluous but intrinsic to architecture.

But there are other ends of architecture equally prominent; and a second has been a definition of purpose in architecture with reference to the architectural community and its own internal history and standards of excellence. These standards include not only such abstract traditional architectural virtues as durability, convenience, beauty, and decorum, but also particular works of architecture that function as iconic and authoritative points of reference: the Parthenon, the Pantheon, the Colosseum, the Arch of Constantine, San Andrea at Mantua, the Tempietto, San Carlo alle Quatra Fontane, the University of Virginia, the Robie House, the Villa Savoye, the Chrysler Building, the Salk Institute, etc. For architects this second purpose is primarily formal rather than pragmatic. And although the formal concerns of architects cannot supersede in importance the pragmatic concerns of their patrons (for if they did, much less architecture would actually get built), these formal concerns are in some way the essence of architecture and are what distinguish architecture from "mere" building, to which architecture is otherwise and at all times necessarily and intrinsically connected.

It should be easy to see the potential tension between these two historic ends of architecture, the inherent possibility for conflict between what the patron wants and what the architect wants. We know however, from seeing successful works of architecture, that such conflicts can be resolved more or less satisfactorily. But there is yet another historically prominent end of architecture, one that goes beyond the good of the patron and his community, and beyond the good of the architect and her community; and that end is the good of the city. This end is implicit in the traditional architectural virtue of decorum; and it is this virtue of decorum that links the community of architecture to that larger community, the city. But this third end implies something else, something more: that architecture is not only an end in itself, but also a contributing means to (as well as one tangible manifestation of) some higher end. This higher end is the good life for human beings; and in an even more direct and fundamental way, the good life for human beings is also the end for which the city exists.

So, to reiterate: historically, one purpose of architecture is pragmatic, and concerns the interests of particular communities that are patrons of architecture. A second purpose is formal, and concerns standards of excellence within the architectural community. And a third purpose---civic purpose---is similar to the others in that it too refers architectural ends to a community; but it differs in that the community with which it is concerned, the city, is rarely if ever the direct patron of architecture. This difference therefore requires some further consideration of just what kind of community the city is, and the nature of the city's purposes.

The Nature of the City

The city is understood best as a community of communities, the foremost purpose of which is to enable its citizens to live the best life possible. This idea is broadly Aristotelian in its outlines, and for human beings the end it identifies is comprehensive, for human beings do not seek the best life

possible for the sake of something else. Clearly, there is considerable disagreement today about both the good life for human beings and the nature and ends of the city; and I will discuss some of those disagreements shortly. But our language itself testifies to this ancient understanding of the city as a community of communities, in that the very word "politics" designates the art of ordering in right relationship the various communities comprising the polis.

As a community of communities, the city exists simultaneously as an ecological order, an economic order, a moral order, and a formal order; and these dynamic orders interact in tense, conflicting, complex and unpredictable ways. Nevertheless, we can see for ourselves that cities occupy land and relate to their adjacent landscape in some particular better-or-worse way; can see the economic order of the city embodied in commercial and familial institutions; can see the moral order of the city in institutions of religion, law, medicine, education, politics, and family; and can see the formal order of the city in architecture and urban design.

Within the larger community of the city, smaller communities provide occasions and social, physical, and cultural contexts within which the purposes of architecture are partially defined. Architects have traditionally given greater attention and prestige to the public and civic spaces of the city, by giving formal primacy to public and civic buildings fronting and defining such spaces. Why have architects done this? Generally, I suspect it is because there has been a mutual recognition among members of smaller communities within the city that what they have in common is their status as citizens. And specific to architects, there has also been recognition that well designed civic spaces are both a symbol and an artifact of the urban community of which architects themselves are part.

This understanding of the ends of architecture, the ends of the city, and their relationship to one another does not deny inherent tensions between the pragmatic, formal, and civic purposes of architecture; nor does it deny that there will always be differences among citizens about the nature of our common good and how best to achieve it. But this understanding does presume that ideas of "the good life" and "the common good" are live ideas; and it also presumes that architects understand themselves to be citizens as well as architects---implying among other things that architects are members of, and therefore have obligations to, more than one community.[1]

Now, from shared and living notions of "the good life," "the common good," "membership" and "obligation," coherent theories and practices of architecture and city making can follow. But I think it is precisely our misery as a profession and as educators that both the culture of architecture and our larger political culture currently lack such shared and live notions.[2] And notwithstanding the

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1 Note that I am not saying that the obligation to the *polis* always trumps every other obligation, or that the *polis* is always in the right. It was, after all, in the golden age of Athens that the city put Socrates to death. It is to say, however, that membership in a political or religious community requires of those who challenge the community's authority some account of the failure of that authority to promote the primary ends that such authority legitimately exists to promote, viz., the well being of the members of the community. In other words, in communities so understood, authority is not challenged because authority itself is inherently bad or malevolent, but rather because some particular authority is regarded as insufficiently authoritative.

2 One could argue that there is a kind of rough and ready intellectual consensus in today's culture of architecture, but that it is incoherent and self contradictory. I think many if not most architects would agree with the following propositions: that the city is the community to which architects are morally obligated; that the city is above all a place of ruthless Darwinian economic competition; that architects must be true to their art; that architects have an obligation to formal innovation; that architects have an obligation to celebrate and express "difference;" that architecture gives physical and spatial form to existing cultural ideals; that architecture can and should be a force for cultural change; that architects have an obligation to be ecologically responsible and to promote and design durable buildings; that architects working in the conditions

urgings from the 1996 *Boyer Report*3 and other quarters that the architectural profession and architectural education reorient ourselves to the making and sustaining of "community," I see few professional and educational programs today with the cultural, intellectual, and institutional resources needed to sustain such an enterprise.

Sources of Renewal

We do not lack these resources entirely. However, I do not think these resources reside in what we tend to consider our elite institutions of higher learning. They may reside as ongoing good habits in architectural programs in universities historically grounded in a regional mission and sensibility. But these good habits may or may not be supported by coherent intellectual articulations of the nature and ends of architecture and architecture's relationship to human communities; and where these good habits are not supported intellectually, I suspect and fear their future is tenuous. Where these intellectual and cultural resources do reside is in those architecture programs located in academic institutions sponsored by religious communities, of which there are currently five in the United States that have accredited professional degree programs: Catholic University, Detroit Mercy, Notre Dame, Andrews University and Judson College.

Now, I can hardly maintain that any of these institutions are or have ever been widely regarded as leaders in American architectural education (though we at Notre Dame are working on it); or that it is necessarily the case they ever will be. I simply maintain that, whether they know it or not, such institutions are unusually well situated and equipped, both culturally and intellectually, to promote coherent theories of architecture and urban design that understand these activities in terms of communal purposes---including the purposes of communities as patrons, the purposes of the community of architects, and the purposes of that larger community which is the city.

One reason an architecture program located in this kind of academic institution should be able to do this is because, if it is healthy, such an institution is already an example of the kind of community that historically has supported and been supported by architecture made with reference to communal purposes. If I can put this another way: although I am not for an instant suggesting either that the theological substance at the heart of such religious communities is unimportant or that its status as believed truth is unchallengeable, regardless of the theological substance at the heart of any such community its communal form is Aristotelian---and is therefore existentially supportive of traditional Aristotelian views of the nature and purpose of community generally, and of the city in particular.

But there's a second reason why architecture programs located in religious universities seem better suited than their secular counterparts to promote community. On the one hand, religious communities tend to regard it as a truth of the human condition that individual human well being is necessarily related to communal membership and obligation. Perhaps even more importantly

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of the modern marketplace can properly disregard durability; that architecture is first and foremost about making places for communities; that architecture is primarily a manifestation of power relations; that good architecture and urban design should promote equality and cultural and economic diversity; that culturally authentic architecture can only be created and understood by an elite *avant garde*, etc., etc. Any or all of these propositions may be defensible in the context of some larger framework. But currently that framework is missing, and the professional "consensus" that such propositions may represent is simply incoherent, little different than no consensus.

3 *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice,* Ernest Boyer and Lee Mitgang, a 1996 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching study of architectural education.

however, such communities have believed and continue to believe that discovering, understanding, and serving the truth is the primary purpose of liberal education. And this last point has, I think, larger implications for architectural education than we tend at first glance to recognize.[4]

This idea that truth is the proper end of a liberal education may seem simply to confirm both the National Architecture Accreditation Board's (NAAB) and the Associated Collegiate Schools of Architecture's (ACSA) own professed regard for the importance of a liberal education for the practice of architecture. But there is in fact a problem here because in many institutions of both higher learning and architectural education the very idea of truth, let alone its pursuit, increasingly is regarded as illusory. The professed ambition instead is to create and propound useful and aesthetically pleasing "fictions;" and to the extent that this is the direction in which the intellectual leadership of architecture and the academy are determined to go, it poses significant intellectual and practical challenges to architects and educators sympathetic to the *Boyer Report*'s call for architectural education and practice to be redirected toward "building community." For while the ambition to create pleasing fictions will always engage the interests of some of the people some of the time, it is a singularly unhelpful approach to the necessarily long term projects of building and sustaining communities. And this is simply because in order for human beings to succeed in achieving long term objectives such as these, we generally need to believe in the truth and goodness of what we are doing.

Theology, Nature, and Architectural Education

IHow might an architectural education seriously engaged with an intellectual tradition grounded in religious community be different? This issue could be approached from a number of different directions. I've written elsewhere at some length about the difference between ethics and architecture grounded in traditional communitarian sensibilities, and ethics and architecture grounded in contemporary individualist sensibilities.[5] But this is only one area where contemporary

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4 Notwithstanding the philosophical and religious origins of education in western culture (including the institution of the university), the long and in some places continuing struggle in the west to demarcate the proper spheres of theology, philosophy, and modern science has made the idea that theology and philosophy aspire to and can say something about truth suspect to both the modern and the post-modern mind. To the modern mind the only truth we can know is scientific truth; and the metaphysical realism of theology and philosophy is dismissed as a charming or not so charming narrative or myth. But perhaps the most important post-modern insights have been that science itself is a kind of narrative, as Thomas Kuhn has argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions;* and that human beings engage no part of the world unmediated by narrative. Taking their cues from Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, many in the academy now regard scientific truth as skeptically as modern scientists have long regarded theological and philosophical truth---notwithstanding the incapacity of these new post-modern narratives to account for their own truth or falsehood.

For persons intellectually unable to abandon questions of truth (whether in science, philosophy, or religion), Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* characterization of man as a being who by his nature is a teller of stories, and by his history a teller of stories that aspire to truth, suggests a philosophical narrative that justifies an understanding of truth and our ability to know it as being at once true and provisional: "the best truth so far," a commitment to which necessarily involves a critical engagement with and extension of historical traditions---a type of engagement that, needless to say, is intrinsic to the purposes of academic institutions sponsored by historic religious communities.

5 See especially my "Ethics in Architecture," *Inland Architect*, May-June 1993: pages 74-83, republished as "Communitarianism and Emotivism: Two Rival Views of Ethics and Architecture" in Nesbitt, Kate (ed.), *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press (1996).

attitudes about architecture and the city will logically differ between communities of shared belief and "communities" of shared unbelief.[6] One might just as profitably consider the formal differences that would likely manifest themselves as a consequence of different understandings of human freedom; or of the relationship between memory and hope and the relationship of these to the creative act; or of the notion of artistic inspiration as it might relate not to the *zeitgeist* but rather to the *heiligegeist.* But here let me limit myself to a consideration of different views of nature and human nature; and on the one hand suggest some implications for the architectural community that follow from an understanding of nature as a product of chance; and on the other hand some implications that follow from a Christian (and antecedently, and still, Jewish) understanding of nature as created by God---a topic I choose in part because of the currency of and enthusiasm for the idea of "sustainable design" within the architectural academy.

Many today regard the belief that nature was created and is sustained by God to be irrational; and find it more rational to believe that nature is a product of chance. But although there are reasons given and evidence marshaled to support either of these conclusions, in a fundamental way both are theories about mystery; and neither can be certified by the kind of logical proof that we customarily associate with either science or mathematics---indeed, scientists and mathematicians come down on both sides of the issue. In the view of nature as created, nature is regarded as somehow purposeful, and this is seen as a sign of God's providence. In the view of nature as a product of chance, there is no purpose in nature beyond what human beings attempt---nobly or pitifully---to impose upon it.

In the chance view of nature, the only "law" discernible is the law of struggle, a process Darwin referred to as natural selection, guided by an impulse that Nietzsche referred to as the will-to-power; and human culture is to be understood above all as a series of power relations. The traditional virtue of justice, for example, becomes in this view an ever shifting compromise between parties of relatively equal power; and all historic so-called "morality" is seen as a mask that disguises each individual's will-to-power (most often from him or herself).

Now I concede that there is substantial evidence all around us to warrant such an interpretation of both nature and culture. But we need to recognize that such an interpretation of nature makes it hard to make a coherent and persuasive case for developing communal sensibilities in architectural education; or for encouraging an ethic of environmental responsibility; or for promoting, say, racial and gender equity in the architectural profession. The fact that some persons simultaneously seem able to hold both this "chance" view of nature *and* these aspirations for architectural education can perhaps be attributed to personal sentiments and cultural habits that have not quite caught up with thought---or vice-versa. Regardless, with the premise that nature is a product of chance that issues in a war of all against all, one might well develop for purposes of self preservation the kind of respect for nature that one develops for a crafty and powerful enemy; but likewise, one could not in (quite precisely) good faith engage in sustained community building and communal enterprises

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6 I am here assuming a certain self-consciousness and intellectual consistency among both unbelievers and believers that are often in fact empirically absent. My own sense is that in the modern / post-modern west, many secularists retain affections for the formal and communal aspects of traditional urban life unaware or unappreciative that such attitudes are a dying vestige of traditional Judaeo-Christian culture. At the same time, one often finds among religious communities (including their leadership) unreflective enthusiasm for suburbia and no understanding whatsoever of the virtues of the city; and I think this reflects a certain lack of awareness of how contemporary religious life is so frequently organized along the individualist / therapeutic model embodied physically in contemporary culture by suburbia. My entire argument for the potential urban formal contributions of religious communities presumes a growing intentionality and self-consciousness within such communities about who we are and what we do.

without in some fundamental way engaging in intellectual self deception. For to engage in such communal activities in good faith and not be self-deceiving implies a different understanding of nature.

Consider therefore an orthodox Jewish and Christian theology of creation and some of its implications for a theory of urbanism and environmental responsibility.7 In this view, the first fact about nature is that it is created by God (which, incidentally, implies neither a literal six-day creation, nor a static view of nature, nor that everything and every impulse found in nature is good). The second fact about nature is that human beings are both part of and different from nature, an understanding which also expresses a common human intuition that human beings occupy a kind of intermediate place in the universe. Philosophically, this view of nature (and human nature) distinguishes itself immediately from at least three other views of nature prominent in the contemporary intellectual landscape.

One view holds that man is fundamentally separate from nature, and nature is simply raw material for human consumption---an operative (if often only implicit) post-sixteenth century notion fundamental to the industrial revolution and modern economies. A second common view of nature--in part a reaction to the first, but also with a long intellectual history of its own--would make no fundamental distinction whatsoever between the human and the natural. But this has the conflicting consequences of on the one hand rendering any human intervention in the natural environment inherently suspect, while on the other hand rendering any such intervention logically immune from criticism. Yet a third view of nature (common among today's critical theorists) holds that nature itself is a "construct," the alleged properties of which are human inventions rather than human discoveries; from which it would seem to follow logically that nature commands no inherent respect, if indeed nature can logically be held to exist at all.

In contrast to these views, historic Jewish and Christian theology understands nature to be real and to exist independently of human beings; that human beings have a nature that in part is itself part of nature; and that it is part of human nature to make physical culture by transforming found nature into cultural artifacts. Because human beings are by nature social, different cultures can be understood as the different social and historical forms of shared human aspirations for and understandings of the best kind of life. Cities, buildings and the cultivated landscape thus may be regarded properly as the physical and spatial forms of culture; and city-making, architecture and agriculture can be understood on the one hand as cultural interventions in nature, but on the other hand as in some sense in themselves natural. This is what St. Thomas Aquinas meant when he wrote that reason is the tool with and by which the human animal participates in nature, and that art is "reason in making." And it is what Aristotle meant when he wrote that "art imitates nature," i.e., that the artist acts towards his or her desired ends in a manner analogous to the way nature acts, because such is man's place in nature as the "rational animal."

To invoke Aristotle yet again is to underscore that divine revelation is not the sole source of this

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7 I would distinguish this theology of creation from the mislabeled "science" of creationism; but at the same time point out the essentially philosophical (as opposed to scientific) character of many of the arguments informing popular (including mainstream media) understandings of evolution. The most recent authoritative Christian statements about the necessary relationship between scientific and religious truth--specifically regarding theories of evolution--have been Pope John Paul II's 1996 "Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences," and more generally his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio.* These have received considerable media attention, but lamentably inadequate media analysis. The full text of the pope's brief remarks on evolution has been published in English under the title "Theories of Evolution" in the March 1997 issue of *First Things*.

traditional western understanding of nature. But biblical religion has been and is today the institutional bearer of this understanding of nature; and Jewish and Christian theology both suggest at least two imperatives that should point architectural education to the ends of urban and environmental responsibility. One is a general imperative to acquire knowledge of nature, which in architectural education would be an imperative to cultivate among architects and their patrons that specific knowledge of nature germane to the art of building. The second imperative would be to promote an environmental ethic that in the Christian tradition falls under the rubric of "stewardship."

Knowledge of nature "germane to building" includes an awareness and understanding of the variety of physical and social forces that influence the building design process and its results: physics, construction materials, climate, geography, human nature, etc. The virtue of stewardship implies both a uniquely human ability to be caretakers of the natural order and the responsibility to do so, precisely because creation belongs to God and not to us. Stewardship also implies recognition that whatever else human beings are, we are also created beings and therefore "of nature;" and that to pursue through building and city making our own good independent of knowledge of and respect for that larger created natural environment of which we are part is to misunderstand the nature of our own good. In the biblical view of human nature the natural order is something which rightly arouses in human beings not only wonder but respect, the latter on occasion linked to an appropriate measure of fear that is itself natural. But even the respect for nature engendered by fear is less like the grudging respect for an enemy than the respect for a friend whose purposes are sometimes but not always the same as our own.

The culture of architecture, including architectural education, is in disarray. Architects today want artistic independence and communal belonging, a sense of inner-driven artistic vocation and more respect from other professions, equality of opportunity and guaranteed results, regional identity and a global economy, advanced technology and communion with nature, consumer goods and a simpler life; and we want it all, right now. Our problem is not that these are not goods worthy of our desire, but rather that human life is a condition in which unlimited desire is certain to be frustrated. Part of the art of living well is learning how to order our desires. Is it too much to expect schools of architecture to at least try to achieve and impart to students a coherent understanding of both architecture and its relationship to the rest of human life? Here I have suggested the kinds of cultural and academic contexts that seem to me the most promising intellectual soil today for nurturing and advancing a communal understanding of architecture, the city, and a sustained and sustaining natural environment. Whether this understanding will again become central or continue to remain marginal to the culture of architecture, only God knows.

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