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The city in the image of man

Following their honoring a goddess at the Piraeas, Thrasymachus, Gloucon, and some others found themselves in discussion with Socrates about the relative merits of justice and injustice and their effects on the persons who possess these qualities. Having fully formed the question by book II of the *Republic*, they agree with Socrates that because it is easier to apprehend something in its larger than in its smaller size, they ought to examine the city in order to see the citizen more clearly.

This point—that the city and the citizen are the same entity but at different scales—came forcefully to mind in reading Professor Robinson's description of the present state of psychology. He asks, what twentieth century achievements in psychology match the discovery of the double helix and the Relativity Theory? In parallel we can ask of urbanism and the architecture that serves it: Have we built and rebuilt any cities that can form citizens as Rome, Paris, and London did between the restoration of a pan European civil life following the disruption of the medieval period and the radical revisions in urbanism running back a century or so from our time? In like manner, are our present-day activities in urbanism and architecture worthy of the foundations laid in this country by Williamsburg and federalist Washington, D.C.? Washington's restoration early in the twentieth century comes to mind, as does the New York City built in the first third of that century. But more recently?

Cities are one thing and towns another, just as the larger questions psychology treats operate at a different scale from those that are more specialized. In this latter realm, Professor Robinson asks, who in recent memory can stand as a peer with Alexander Bain and J. S. Mill, William James and Wilhelm Wundt, Alfred Binet and Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud and Wolfgang Kohler? In parallel, we might ask, what towns with a special purpose are capable today of performing the task of Medicean Florence, entrepot Venice, Prince Henry's Lisbon, Erasmus' Basel, the Oxford of the colleges, and, in colonial America, the organized civil mercantile landscape of Philadelphia or that mediator between the West Indies and the southern frontier, Charleston, North Carolina?

What Socrates and his city established has provided the ground against which all subsequent discussion and development of both the city and the citizen has been played out. Because the standard set by the buildings on the Acropolis was set by the gods themselves, their example has called the best out of the successors of Athens. Like the texts that discussed the psychology of their citizens, those buildings were politically adept, morally self-conscious, transcendentally alert, and aesthetically appealing. Not everything in those old texts and in and among the building worked together toward a common end, but the texts were important for their reflections about the actions that transpired in an urban realm, and that realm both furnished a setting for the actions and provided a visible embodiment of what was most important about those actions.

By our standards, the citizens of Socrates' Athens were preoccupied by only a fragment of the larger urban and architectural realm. While the Acropolis and the other sacred places were worthy of the best that the architect could provide, the rest of the city was given only serviceable buildings and undistinguished open places. The Romans added civil and domestic structures to the category of buildings deserving the attention of architects, and in their fora, baths, stadia, and other buildings they invented ways to make areas open to the sky as important as the roofed ones. But not until the Renaissance did architects contrive ways to provide coherent relationships between the buildings and the open areas, and to do so with an architecture whose theoretical explication was congruent with the rational explication of other fields open to theory. But still the range of things that concern us was incomplete until, in the waning years of the seventeenth century, people understood that both the urban and rural realms existed in the same landscape, that that landscape was itself capable of responding to the ministrations of the architect, and that in doing so, the rural and urban were being tied into a unity capable of supporting the acts of the citizens who were its stewards. These four steps provide the basis currently available for producing eurythmic relationships between the dwellings of the gods, the settings for civil activities, and the sources of support and refreshment for the citizens. That is to say, with this fully mature understanding of where and what people build to support the civic life we have the basis for our cosmopolitan modern built world.

Uniting these developments is a recognition that people are a part of the natural world in which they live, that they are endowed with a human nature, and that that human nature imposes on them certain duties relative to living in nature and with one another, duties they fulfill through their activities in a polity.

Socrates first articulated the basis for these developments: the city is man writ large, and the citizen carries within his habits of mind and within his very character the habits and character of the city of which he is a citizen. Now add to that the fruit of later thought and we reach our present understanding, that politics, which is the art of living well together, is more important than architecture, and urbanism is a material embodiment of politics and the counterpart in stone to a regime's constitution.

The most profound abbreviation of these ideas is in the anthropomorphic analogy. This trope, which is the *Republic* in

emblematic form, is fundamental to any architecture and urbanism worthy of the name.

But now that emblem has been eclipsed by lesser analogies. Ours, after all, is a time when we fail to remember that fiction contains the clearest form of truth, that the genre of tragedy is the counterpart to the city that aspires to provide justice for all its citizens, and that qualities are not commensurable with quantities. By now it is commonly accepted that the city is a market and a melting pot and that its most apt analogue is the machine. This is the form that the professionalization Professor Robinson described in psychology has taken in urbanism.

As evidence, take such a simple and mundane preoccupation of those who live in cities as parking. While "the parking problem" afflicts us all, different places address it differently. In Rome, parked cars are treated like many other nuisances. Their use is discouraged, people are left to stash their cars in whatever space is available, and the fabric of the city's streets, piazzas, and buildings remains largely unaffected by their unsightly presence. In Rome, the ever improving care of the buildings and open places declare that continuity across time is more important than modishness and that being a la mode is more a matter for private display in public than a basis for public expenditure. The parking problem is acute. A Roman cab driver observed to me at five o'clock one morning that the only people driving about on the streets at that hour are the thieves and the people looking for parking places. But Rome will survive the auto invasion just as it did that of the Goths and the Grand Tourists from England.

In Paris, where tradition favors not continuity but innovation, for half a millennium the city has been constantly under reconstruction to exploit the latest fashion and thereby stay ahead of everyone else. The present generation has excavated and rebuilt whole *places* to store the cars that enter the city on roadways specially built to facilitate their movement. The effect on the public realm has been mitigated to the greatest extent possible, and often the new roadways and rebuilt *places* enhance that realm, but the design life of the improvements is perhaps longer than that of the auto mania that justifies them. And still, the parking problem is acute.

In the United States, where urban infrastructure problems are addressed expeditiously, serially, and largely without connection to one another, we disrupt the city's physical continuity to build high-capacity roadways to move the cars and we build outsized parking garages to receive them. Normally, following the machine analogy, the garages' designs present the buildings primarily as urban parking garages. Only exceptionally, for example in Charleston, does a city insist that instead the garages be designed as properly scaled, detailed, and sited civic buildings in which cars are parked, each building joining all the others to present in urban and architectural form the hierarchical distinctions among the civic activities the urban setting facilitates. In the United States, only belatedly is the controversial notion taking hold that ever higher volumes of traffic and the desire for ever more parking is a symptom of a profound misunderstanding of what cities, towns, and rural areas must provide the citizen to facilitate their living life not only abundantly but well.

The degradation of the city into a mere market, the misapprehension that its service as a melting pot is service enough, and that it best be understood and treated as a machine stem from circumstances similar to those in Professor Robinson's description of psychology's afflictions.

The foundations for the shift from man to machine were laid in the Enlightenment's disregard for the transcendental. Luckily, that age was also supplied with exceptional minds—for example those of Burke and Jefferson, of Madison and Adams—well stocked with historical learning and steeped in experience with current affairs. In exercising their citizenship they contrived constitutional instruments capable of providing a substitute for the dethroned transcendental in political affairs and acknowledging the limitations and duties that that dethronement entailed.

There then followed the intellectual, political, scientific, and commercial turmoil of the nineteenth century. Circumstances forced the city to become a melting pot and led to its becoming a market first of all. To speak a common language, share a common birthplace, and honor the same gods were no longer acceptable as the conditions necessary for participation in a political body in the developing multicultural, pluralistic world. But a new birth of freedom came from what Lincoln called a "proposition," namely, "that all men are created equal," a proposition that entails the Greeks' discovery that political associations are natural and that their end is to allow individuals to confront moral propositions. That proposition's importance was made manifest when the alternative exclusionist position based on superficial differences reached its logical counterpart in the twentieth century's genocides. We have yet to absorb into our city building practices the lessons about the justness of equality and the cost of exclusion.

After the migrations, dislocations, innovations, and expectations of the nineteenth century had vastly complicated the process of building cities and building in cities, it is little wonder that in aesthetics, in the broad sense in which Professor Robinson uses the term, the twentieth century substituted the machine for the anthropos in the analogies covering activities that wed craft and theory to practice. The substitution was an easy one because after all, men make machines, and machines extend man's power over the natural world from which he had become alienated. Having found a new instrument to command, during the twentieth century men used machines to kill the connection between traditional and current practice, and they substituted their new god for man as the city's analogue.

For rebuilding psychology, Professor Robinson suggests points of departure in the civic, moral, aesthetic, and transcendental realms. In parallel, let me present four principles that can rebuild our city building practices. If implemented, we would restore the city's capacity to facilitate man's civil life and our cities would stand in proud analogy to humankind.[1] (The principles as presented here were

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[1] These principles are discussed more fully in "Learning Good Urban Form from Pompeii and Elsewhere, Supplemental Report of the Pompeii Forum Project,"

formulated with particular relevance to the civil and historical traditions and practices prevailing in the United States and therefore would require translation for other settings.)

1. Commerce must always be civilized.
   A market's prosperity provides the material basis for the citizens' pursuit of justice, but the goods of the market are not the same as the good of the citizens. The manner of conducting the market, and the visible place the market occupies in the city, must make clear this hierarchical distinction that allows the civic values that embody transcendental ends to predominate in the lives of the citizens.

2. The same building components must be used in the public and the private realm and in both architectural and urban applications.
   Buildings make cities, and the components that make the buildings ought also to be used to make the things in cities that are not buildings—bridges, street cross sections, plaza elaborations, fountains, fences, steps, etc. Doing so provides continuity between public and private things and allows for the comparison of like things so that the relative importance of the public and the private and between the mundane and the transcendental can be clearly evident. Needless to say, using traditional rather than machine-derived elements in building is a necessity, lest the connection between past and present be lost.

3. Anything that is done beyond the center has its complement in the center.
   The center is the place where the city lives its civil life most intensely. Private actions and more local public ones on the periphery should serve as backdrops to that public center, and they ought to have their complement in the center. A person who plants trees in his front yard ought to assist in endowing the public landscape in the center. In this way, the center gains a density worthy of its superior position within the urban realm.

4. Landscape and architecture are always in a dynamic reciprocal relationship.
   American urbanism is based on this principle, which does not necessarily hold elsewhere. In Italy, something growing in a piazza is in a pot or is a weed while in the United States the greensward replaces the piazza. The result is a continuity between rural and urban in the built-upon and cultivated landscape that supports the polyvalent system of governmental jurisdictions defining the multiplicity of overlapping duties within the civil realm.

These four principles of good city building run parallel to those Professor Robinson proposes for psychology. Like

his, they recognize that humankind is the proper focus of our attentions. Knowing what the character of humankind is provides the basis for the reform needed to build, or rebuild, the city in the image and likeness of man. And having a city built in that image and likeness will reveal what we seek.

But which do we rebuild first, our understanding of man or the city which is man writ large? As Socrates explained in his presentation of the so-called city of pigs, each citizen has a job to do in bringing into existence and maintaining the well-ordered city. In doing so, justice enters in, not as something added, but as the result of having made the proper, proportionate, harmonic additions necessary to the health of the city and its citizens while avoiding the excesses that destroy it.

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http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~jjd5t/cww/1998/sup-rep.html, a web-based report from the Pompeii Forum Project conducted under the sponsorship of the University of Virginia, John J. Dobbins, Director.