The City around Us

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Way We Are

It may seem odd to many people that a book devoted to environmental ethics includes an essay on the city. We often speak of the environment as if it is everywhere except where we live. The environment is Yellowstone, Estes Park, Cape Hatteras, and other vacation spots. It is the Amazon River basin, Alaska, East Africa, places that many of us care about preserving even though we will never visit them. Indeed, the very logic of wilderness preservation demands that most of us will never visit these areas. For if a great many of us were to visit, say, the Maroon Bells Wilderness Area in Colorado, it would soon take on the trappings of an urban park. That so many of us are willing to pay to preserve places that we never expect to visit confounds conventional economists and would-be developers. After all, what could the value of these areas consist in if not their extractable resources and their potential for recreational development? It is no wonder that such people have no better explanation for the rise of preservationism than that it is a conspiracy of wealthy "limousine liberals" who are out to deny the rest of us the benefits of economic growth. But this story is one that we cannot pursue in this essay. What is important here is that many of us think of the environment as including "the sea around us," in the words of the American naturalist Rachel Carson, but excluding the city around us, and this is a serious mistake. The environment in which most of us spend most of our time is the urban environment, and any deep understanding of our relationship to the environment cannot ignore this fact.

Increasing urbanization has been a worldwide trend for several centuries. In 1800 about 2 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas; by 1900 the figure had doubled to 4 per cent; and by 1978 it was 38 per cent. This trend has been even more dramatic in the United States. In 1800 only 6 per cent of our population lived in cities; by 1900 the figure had increased to 40 per cent; and by 1977, 74 per cent of our population lived in cities.1 Indeed, depending on how we define the key terms, it is arguable that almost no rural areas remain in the United States. When we think of rural life we often think of our forebears, real or imagined, living their lives almost completely untouched by urban influences. They worked on the land, educated their children at home, made their own household necessities, and joined with neighbors at quilting bees, dances, and hoedowns for recreation. Today almost none of this exists. A drive in the country almost anywhere reveals factories, mines, and warehouses, the encroachments of the industrial functions associated with cities. Rural people today often commute to industrial jobs, gardening in their spare time. The farm, for the few who still own one, is frequently rented to someone who can afford the enormous capital investment needed to make it profitable. Except for rare exceptions, children are no longer educated at home; they are bussed to consolidated schools where they are taught from the same syllabus prescribed for children in towns and cities. Necessities are purchased on shopping trips to the city, or at the new K-Mart in what used to be the village. Entertainment is mostly television and the latest records from Billboard's "Hot 100." Almost the only remaining rural areas are those that are preserved by the federal government, and even some of these would have to be excepted. Yosemite, for example, is one of California's largest cities from May to September. It even has its own jail! And the amenities available there far exceed those that can be obtained in most small towns. But however we define the key terms, it is clear that the urban environment is pervasive. Cities are central in our lives, and despite this or because of it, we both love them and hate them.

1.2 Views of the City

Americans have always had complicated and ambiguous attitudes towards cities. This is reflected in political rhetoric, literature, films, philosophy, and

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1 This international statistics are taken from the Population Reference Bureau (1976). The American statistics are from the Bureau of Census (1977). Recent data confirm these results, for e.g. various reports available from The Population Institute (www.populationinstitute.org).
even architecture. Some intellectuals have been overtly anti-urban. They have seen the city as decadent and depraved; it could corrupt even the best of people. Others have not been anti-urban in principle, but they have viewed American cities as vastly inferior to those of Europe. According to these thinkers, American cities celebrate class materialism and vulgar commerce at the expense of community, cultivation, and refinement.

The first important anti-urban tract written in America was Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, composed in 1781. Jefferson (1964: 158) argued that cities were immoral to good government: “The mobs of the great cities add just as much to the support of pure government as soro do to the strength of the human body.” In a letter to Benjamin Rush, Jefferson wrote: “I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man.” Jefferson thought that everyone should be a farmer; or work in an occupation whose services are needed by farmers, like carpenters, masons, and smiths.

Most of our leading nineteenth-century literary figures shared Jefferson’s views. Emerson thought that only farmers create wealth, and that all trade rests on their labours. Emerson (1883: 148) also shared Jefferson’s views about the moral superiority of the farmer: “That uncorrupted behavior which we admire in animals and in young children belongs to him [the farmer], to the hunter, the sailor—the man who lives in the presence of Nature. Cities force growth and make men talkative and entertaining, but they make them artificial.” Emerson’s friend Thoreau (1906: 51) disliked cities and their culture even more: “I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society”. Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe all depicted the city as a sewer of evil and wickedness. In a story set in the future, Poe (1978) portrays a New York so decimated that archaeologists have trouble reconstructing the lives of its inhabitants. Finally, it is determined that nine-tenths of New York was covered by a series of pagodas devoted to the idols of Wealth and Fashion. Although sometimes Henry James tried to like American cities he ultimately failed, living most of his adult life as an expatriate in England. He hated the uniformity of New York’s architecture and the diversity of its language and culture. He could never see the skyscraper-dominated skyline as anything other than a “pincushion in profile”.

The views of the philosophers were, as we might expect, more subtle and complex. Although William James did not share completely the views of his brother Henry, he was concerned about the “hollowness” and “brutality” of the large cities. He, along with John Dewey, advocated a decentralized city in which community is recognized as the prime virtue. James’s Harvard colleague, California-born Josiah Royce, was more radical in his views. He lodged three charges against the great cities. First, they were so overwhelmed with large numbers of alienated and unassimilated people that the very fabric of society was stretched to breaking point. Secondly, the centralization of culture bred conformity and intellectual stagnation. And thirdly, the cities encouraged the “spirit of the mob” which is antithetical to the preservation of liberty.

In a characteristic passage Royce (1908a: 72) attacks large circulation newspapers on the grounds that they produce “a monotonously uniform triviality of mind in a large proportion of our city and suburban population”. Royce’s ideal of democracy was the New England town meeting in which “men... take counsel together in small groups, who respect one another’s individuality, who meanwhile criticize one another constantly” (ibid. 87). He feared that a highly centralized and urbanized nation would “fall rapidly under the hypnotic influence of a few leaders, of a few fatal phrases” (ibid. 95). But contrary to James and Dewey, Royce did not believe that decentralization within the city was a viable solution to urban problems. Rather, Royce advocated a thoroughgoing decentralization of American society in which cities would simply become less important.

We need... a newer and wiser provincialism. I mean the sort of provincialism which makes people want to idealize, to adorn, to embolden, to educate their own province; to hold sacred its traditions, to honor its worthy dead, to support and to multiply its public possessions. I mean the spirit which shows itself in the multiplying of public libraries, in the laying out of public parks, in the work of local historical associations, in the enterprises of village improvement societies... I mean also the present form of that spirit which has originated, endowed, and fostered the colleges and universities of our Western towns, cities and states, and which is so well shown throughout our country in our American pride in local institutions of learning.

The views of the most important distinctively American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, are especially interesting. Wright was raised in rural Wisconsin and never overcame his initial experiences in Chicago. Throughout his life he saw the city as ugly, brutal, and impersonal. He often drew an analogy between cities and malignant tumours, with the architect having the
responsibility to "take away all urban structure and depravity... and then—absorb and regenerate the tissue poisoned by cancerous overgrowth" (Wright: 1958: 97). Wright thought that technical innovation would make traditional cities obsolete, and envisioned a utopian city he called Broadacre. Now, with the hindsight of almost four decades, it is depressing to realize that Wright's utopian city is more like the sprawling megalopolis of Los Angeles than the functional and picturesque city of San Francisco.

Although the anti-urban tendencies of American thought are very striking indeed, it would be wrong to exaggerate them. Some Americans, like Walt Whitman, celebrated the city. And undoubtedly anti-urban traditions exist in other societies as well. Still, surveys have indicated that most Americans feel great antipathy for cities, even if they live in them. And since the American experience has been quite different from the European experience, it is not surprising that this should be so. Our ruling mythology teaches that we are descended from people who left the "old world" to escape poverty and oppression. Our forebears came to America to begin anew on land of their own. The cities all too often have been seen as a remnant of the past that our forebears were escaping, as a part of the old world transplanted to the new. Undoubtedly much of this mythology is demonstrably false. But true or false, it is such ideas that have shaped our perceptions of the city.

One effect of our anti-urban tradition is that we have been slow to develop an urban policy. This is especially surprising since almost as long as there have been cities in America there have been those who have thought them to be in crisis. The French observer Alexis de Tocqueville, in his classic Democracy in America first published in 1835, wrote:

The lower ranks which inhabit these cities [Philadelphia and New York] constitute a rabble even more formidable than the populace of European towns. They consist of freed blacks, in the first place, who are condemned by the laws and by public opinion to a hereditary state of misery and degradation. They also contain a multitude of Europeans who have been driven to the shores of the New World by their misfortunes or their conduct and they bring to the United States all our greatest vices without any of these interests which counteract this baneful influence. As inhabitants of a country where they have no civil rights they are ready to turn all the passions which agitate the community to their own advantage; thus, within the last few months serious riots have broken out in Philadelphia and New York.

De Tocqueville went on to warn:

"Take away all urban structure and depravity... and then—absorb and regenerate the tissue poisoned by cancerous overgrowth." (Wright: 1958: 97).

Perhaps de Tocqueville's gloomier predictions have not been realized. Still, who would deny that cities today face daunting problems, ranging from deterioration of basic services like transportation, education, and public safety to the problems of poverty, or that the quality of urban life has declined in recent years and continues to decline? Despite this, it was not until 1978 during the Carter administration that the federal government formulated an explicit urban policy. Of course, from the very foundation of the republic there have been de facto urban policies. The decisions made in Washington concerning housing, health care, and so forth have greatly affected the cities. But all too often these decisions have been made with little sensitivity as to whether or not their impacts on urban areas have been coherent and consistent.

Although cities have been studied by economists, political scientists, sociologists, and geographers, and despite the fact that cities are the primary environment for most of us, fundamental questions about the cities around us have frequently been overlooked or ignored. Are cities good for us? Should we try to reform them, abolish them, or preserve them the way they are? How do cities affect our individual psychologies and our collective political and social systems? How do they affect our values? What influence do they have on our sense of justice, and on our efforts to create a better society? Obviously not all these questions can be addressed in this essay. What I hope to do is to raise some fundamental questions about the urban environment, and to show that these are not "technical" questions as conceived by social scientists, but rather fundamental value questions which go to the very core of what we are and how we live; and that, indeed, the "technical" questions can only be meaningfully addressed in the context of widespread discussion and debate concerning these more fundamental questions.

In Section 2 I try to make clear how I use some basic terms, for example, "city" and "urban area," and sketch some future trends in urban development. In Section 3 I discuss some urban problems and the economist's approach to them. Section 4 focuses on one problem in some detail: the preservation of urban landmarks. Finally, in Section 5, I discuss the nature and role of utopian
2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 What are Cities?

Before we can come to any systematic understanding of the city around us, we must be clear about what we mean by 'city'. Most of us seem willing to use the term 'city' interchangeably with 'urban area'. If we make a distinction at all it is this one: the city is the city proper; an urban area includes suburbs and other areas touched by the city proper. In the past the distinction between cities and urban areas was much sharper. The term 'city' was formerly reserved for the citizens of a community, while 'urban area' referred to the place which they inhabited. In this sense, cities, like nations, can be in exile, and it is this sense in which St Augustine spoke of the community of believers, widely scattered as it is, as 'the city of God'. These considerations are important because they remind us that any assessment of the quality of life in a city cannot ignore the importance of community. We shall return to this theme in Sections 4.7 and 4.8, but for present purposes I shall follow ordinary usage in speaking of cities both as people and as places.

The main problem in developing an adequate definition of the term 'city' is that a very wide range of things have been called by that name. A very small city in Illinois seems to have little in common with Tokyo or Singapore. The ancient cities of the Middle East could hardly have been more different from Los Angeles. I shall not try to give necessary and sufficient conditions for being a city. Our purposes will be well enough served by sketching three characteristics or 'symptoms' which most cities—ancient or modern, Eastern or Western—exhibit to some degree.

When we think of cities most of us think of areas that are very crowded; and indeed, population density is one of the marks of a city. But there is no magic number such that everything which reaches a certain threshold of density is a city and everything which fails to reach this threshold is not. The population density of cities varies greatly. San Francisco is almost seven times as dense as Dallas, and Manhattan is four times as dense as San Francisco. Rural areas in the Far East often have population densities of 2,000 per square mile, while some American cities, for example Jacksonvile and Oklahoma City, have population densities of 600 to 700 people per square mile.9 This shows that cities are not areas of 'absolute' high density, rather they are areas of 'relative' high density. What is characteristic of cities is that they are significantly more dense than the regions which surround them. Another feature of cities that comes rapidly to mind is their occupational structure. When we think of cities we think of people who earn their living buying, selling, and trading, rather than farming. And indeed, the second mark of a city is that its inhabitants work mainly in non-agricultural occupations. Finally, the third characteristic of cities is that they are important cultural, religious, economic, and administrative centres for the regions that surround them.

2.2 Future Trends

Cities have changed enormously since the time of the Greeks, and there is no question that they will change enormously in the future. The international trends are clear: World population will continue to increase, and the urban population will increase even more. The social structure of the world will be dominated increasingly by huge urban concentrations like those of Mexico City and Tokyo. And the problems with which we must be concerned as global citizens will increasingly be their problems.

The prospects for the United States, however, are not quite so clear, as a look at our own recent history shows. The process of suburbanization began in a major way during the prosperity of the 1920s. During that decade the suburban population of the seventeen largest cities increased almost 40 per cent, a much higher rate of growth than that of the central cities.4 The Great Depression and World War II inhibited the tendency towards suburbanization, but encouraged by federal housing and highway programmes, it exploded in the post-World War II period. The census figures tell the story well. The suburban share of the population was 35 per cent in 1950. By 1960 it had increased to 45 per cent, and by 1970 it was 50 per cent. During this period the suburbs gained in population mainly at the expense of rural areas. As a result, the country became increasingly urbanized. Since 1970, however, there have been dramatic shifts. In the last decade more Americans have left the cities than have moved to them. Small towns with populations of less than 2,500 are the fastest growing demographic unit, and many rural areas, particularly those in the sunbelt, have been experiencing unprecedented growth. It is far from clear what, if anything, these trends mean. They may be

9 These statistics are taken from lectures by Professor Jean Gottman of Oxford University in the early 1970s.

short-term statistical anomalies with very little significance in the long run. Or they may reflect an important long-term change in environmental preferences. But even if the latter is true, it is still not easy to say precisely what this trend foreshadows about our future.

Some geographers and planners have speculated that we are witnessing a shift from an epoch dominated by cities to an epoch dominated by "urban fields." Until the electronics revolution of the last decade it was necessary for people and businesses to reside in close proximity to each other and to sources of relevant information. These circumstances gave rise to hierarchical cities with a central core devoted to business and administration. But with improved transportation and communication it is no longer necessary for people and business to be located close to each other in space. For this reason the traditional city with its dominant central core is redundant and unnecessary, or so some have argued. The central city can and is being replaced by a decentralized urban field, with no single region dominant over the others. If this hypothesis is correct, the flight from the central cities may not be anti-urban at all; it may be the first step in the creation of a new kind of urban area.

Whatever the future holds for America's cities, it is clear that many people no longer want to live in them, and the numbers is increasing. In the pages ahead we shall discuss a range of questions about the city and urban problems with a view to putting them in philosophical perspective.

3. URBAN PROBLEMS AND ECONOMIC THEORY

Cities confront us with several different kinds of problems. Some are unique to cities, while others exist in rural areas as well but are exacerbated by the urban environment. Some urban problems are rooted in what it is to be a city. For example, one of the characteristics of a city, as we saw in Section 2.3, is that it is an area of relatively high population density. It is not surprising, then, that cities have very high levels of noise and air pollution. Historically, cities have also been associated with high rates of infectious disease, and even today cities have a great many public health problems, ranging from high rates of cancer and ulcers to high rates of suicide and drug addiction. Cities also have high rates of violent death. In both the United States and Western Europe, the rates of traffic death and violent crime increase as population density increases.16

It should be evident to even the casual observer that cities face some unique problems, as well as some very severe instances of some-familiar ones. Moreover, urban problems often resist the conventional solutions proposed by economists and policy-makers. To see why, we must enter the thicket of their terminology.

3.1 Internalizing Externalities

Economists are happiest with what they call private goods. A private good is something to which some assignable individual, whether corporate or not, has an entitlement. He can sell it, or buy more of it. He can exclude people from using it, or he can charge people for using it at his discretion. Private goods are the capitalist's ideal: he would like everything to be a private good. In our society private goods include my Hawaiian shirts, your copy of Morality's Progress, and Ronald Reagan's ranch. Sometimes conflicts arise over how individuals use their private goods. The problem is that individuals do not always bear all of the costs associated with producing or consuming these goods. Consider a trivial but real example.

My neighbour has a wood stove which she uses to heat her house. Since Colorado averages 300 days of sunshine per year, I prefer to dry my laundry on the clothes-line even in winter. But I cannot, for the smoke and soot from my neighbour's chimney invades my property and would soil my laundry if I were to hang it out to dry. From an economist's point of view, my neighbour is getting off cheap. I am bearing part of the cost of her heating with wood. She is "externalizing" these costs to me, in the form of the smoke and soot which fouls my yard. The economist's solution is to "internalize" these externalities by requiring my neighbour to install smoke-abatement equipment, or by requiring her to compensate me for giving up my right to dry my laundry on my clothes-line in winter. This approach is potentially very powerful, as can be seen from another example which is more serious and just as real.

According to a government study, 2 million asbestos-related cancer deaths will occur in the next thirty-five years due to exposures that have already taken place.17 This is an average of more than 50,000 deaths per year. Monetary losses from illness caused by asbestos exposure are estimated in the hundreds of millions. These losses are part of the cost of producing and consuming asbestos, yet they are not borne by the companies involved nor their customers. Rather, these costs are externalized into the bodies of asbestos workers.

16. See, e.g., the essays by Welcher (1968), and in Wrigge, Jr. (1963).

17. For discussions of the urban problems mentioned in this paragraph see the following: Hamilton and Gibson (1967); Hig et al. (1972); US Department of Housing and Urban Development (1970); and Fischer (1967).
and into the society as a whole in the form of higher insurance premiums and health-care costs. If these costs were internalized, the price of asbestos would be much higher, reflecting the true cost of producing and consuming this substance, and much less asbestos would be used and many fewer people would die. In this case it is easy to see what is to be gained by some and lost by others by internalizing externalities.

3.2 Some Problems for the Economist

Requiring individuals and corporations to internalize externalities is potentially a powerful approach to many environmental problems. Unfortunately, however, this approach has some problems of its own. First, it is more difficult even in theory to identify externalities than it might at first seem. Consider an example. Some people are very sensitive to the clothes worn by others. They find Hawaiian shirts, or mismatched colours, or white socks with black shoes, offensive and upsetting. Still, I doubt that many people would say that I ought to compensate the sensitive soul who dislikes my clothes. We do not think of the annoyance caused to others by dressing unconventionally as an externality that should be internalized. What is it that she doesn't have a right to foul my air. This suggests that the identification of externalities rests on some prior conception of how rights are distributed—that is, who has what rights. But the determination of who has what rights is not decided by the economist's call for internalizing externalities; instead that call assumes that we have already answered this prior question about the distribution of rights.12

A second problem with the economist's approach becomes especially apparent in the city. Almost everything an urban dweller does impinges on others. Noise, conversation, and music are ubiquitous. Hundreds of passers-by cannot fail to note the state of my house. How I dispose of my garbage, how often I use my air conditioner, and when I drive my car, all affect others. How can the economist deal with a situation in which externalities are everywhere? The problem is this. The economist's approach suggest a picture in which the usual situation is one in which if I were to exercise suitable restraint, then my use of my private goods would affect only me. In those few cases when it does affect others, I should be forced to internalize these effects. But this picture does not conform very well to urban life. There, it seems, it is rare when, with suitable restraint, one's use of a private good affects only oneself. I enjoy the taste of my Szechuan eggplant alone, but I share the aroma with my neighbour.

3.3 Public Goods: The Economist's Rejoinder and a Reply

In an effort to deal with these problems and others, economists have developed the notion of a public good. Public goods tend to fall into two categories. First, there are some goods that just do not have the logical characteristics of private goods. Everyone benefits from them, though it is difficult to say how much; and it is difficult or impossible to deny benefits to those who are unwilling to pay. Police and fire protection, and access to the legal system fan into this category. But secondly, there are goods, which although they could be denied to those who are unwilling or unable to pay, we believe everyone is entitled to anyway. Education and health care are in this category. Public goods of both varieties are typically provided by governments and financed by taxes.

The introduction of public goods, necessary though it is, creates new problems that cannot easily be resolved. Consider an example. Although there is considerable dispute over how to define 'clean air', almost no one doubts that clean air is a public good and that Denver's air is dirty. It is also clear that noise, conversation, and music are ubiquitous. Hundreds of passers-by cannot fail to note the state of my house. How I dispose of my garbage, how often I use my air conditioner, and when I drive my car, all affect others. How can the economist deal with a situation in which externalities are everywhere? The problem is this. The economist's approach suggests a picture in which the usual situation is one in which if I were to exercise suitable restraint, then my use of my private goods would affect only me. In those few cases when it does affect others, I should be forced to internalize these effects. But this picture does not conform very well to urban life. There, it seems, it is rare when, with suitable restraint, one's use of a private good affects only oneself. I enjoy the taste of my Szechuan eggplant alone, but I share the aroma with my neighbour.

12 Those who are inspired by the economic analysis of the law might wish to go so far as to advocate distributing all rights on the basis of economic efficiency. For general background see Posner (1981).

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heart attacks per year. These heart attacks are not "acts of God"; they are caused by people driving cars. Of course there is no single driver who causes all of these heart attacks, or perhaps even one of them. And we cannot say with certainty which of the thousands of heart attacks which occur in Denver each year are caused by carbon monoxide. It should also be said that drivers in Denver are not wicked people. They do not drive with the intention of causing their neighbours' heart attacks. Rather, they use their cars for the same reasons we do: in order to get to work, to go shopping, and so forth. The "extra" heart attacks are an unintended, though foreseeable, consequence of their individual actions, taken collectively. It should also be said that undoubtedly some of those who suffer heart attacks themselves drive cars. They are not simply the innocent victims of other people's behaviour. On the other hand it also should be noted that in all likelihood some of the victims do not drive, and many of those who do might well prefer other means of transportation were they available. These considerations are relevant in morally evaluating those who drive in Denver. They might lead us to soften the judgements we might otherwise make. Still, whatever we might say about the character of those individuals who drive, it must be acknowledged that our collective behaviour sometimes seriously hurts and perhaps even kills innocent people (e.g. young children). They are wronged even if as individuals we don't wrong them. This should lead us to ask: how should a morally conscientious person respond to this?

Some might argue that we should refrain from driving. They might reason in a way that is reminiscent of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant: I should only use an automobile if I am willing that everyone should use an automobile. But if everyone were to use an automobile, then some innocent people will be seriously harmed. Since I am unwilling to permit innocent people to be seriously harmed, I should not use my automobile. Although this argument follows a familiar pattern of reasoning, it seems to go wrong here. After all, if only half as many people used cars as do now, perhaps no heart attacks would be caused by air pollution. From the fact that I don't want everyone to drive it doesn't follow that I want no one to drive. But the problem with this response to the argument is that just as I might reason in this way to the conclusion that I have no moral duty not to drive, so might everyone reason to this conclusion. And the result is that too or so innocent people suffer heart attacks as a consequence of our actions.

One way of trying to escape this conclusion is to deny that any innocent people are wronged. It might be suggested that environmental problems, like air pollution, do not by and large result in the deaths of particular individuals who are identifiable in advance. Rather, high levels of air pollution impose additional risk on a large pool of individuals, and only a small number of them suffer heart attacks. What we should do is to offer people a deal: Suppose that it would cost automobile owners $500 each to eliminate the risk of heart attack caused by air pollution. By voting, cost-benefit analysis, or some other procedure we could present people with a choice: either take your chances with heart attack and pay nothing, or eliminate the risk of pollution-caused heart attack and pay $500. From this perspective the moral problem seems to vanish. Those who suffer heart attacks caused by air pollution are just the losers in a democratic decision.

But there are a great many problems with this approach. First, those who suffer the heart attacks may not have been those who were willing to take the risk. This is especially important in view of the magnitude of the losses. Ordinarily we think that if the rules of a policy or a decision that is really a gamble are very great, people should be permitted to opt out. Most of us would not object too strenuously if a dollar were deducted from our weekly pay and used to purchase a lottery ticket. It is likely that we would lose a dollar a week this way. But a dollar a week isn't much to lose, and there is always the chance that we may win. But suppose instead that we stood to lose our houses. Suppose that a majority of our neighbours had agreed to wager the entire neighbourhood on the outcome of the Super Bowl. Even though there is a chance that we might win and win very big, we would be indignant at being compelled to risk so much. The air pollution case is like this one in some important respects. Those who lose the air pollution bet lose quite a lot indeed. They forfeit their health and perhaps even their lives. It is wrong for a majority to require everyone to play this high-risk game. A second and perhaps more fundamental objection to this way out is that the distinction between individual and statistical heart attacks is really bogus. Statistical heart attacks are just individual heart attacks about which we know very little. But we do know this: in both cases the victim has a life with friends, family, relatives, acquaintances, a job, a hobby, a pet, and so forth. Our ignorance concerning which individuals will suffer from air pollution makes no moral difference. But whether or not we can identify in advance the victims...
of our policies in no way determines whether there are such victims. The moral price is the same in each case.

The preceding discussion has unearthed two characteristic features of environmental problems as they arise in the city around us: (1) they often concern the provision and preservation of public goods, and (2) they often arise because individuals find it rational to behave in a way that is collectively irrational. I have tried to show that it is the very nature of the city to exacerbate such problems. I have also argued that these problems cannot be adequately treated from a purely economic point of view. In the next section I shall discuss a specific urban environmental problem. It involves issues in which the limitations of a purely economic analysis are readily apparent. It is an issue which involves conflicting values. It is the problem of preserving landmarks.

4. PRESERVING LANDMARKS

In the city in which I live there is a movie theatre which was built in 1936. For an entire generation, this ornate, art deco theatre was a home away from home. It was where kids spent Saturday afternoons, where teenagers would go on dates, and where their parents would enjoy an evening out. But in the 1970s the Boulder Theater fell upon hard times. It was no longer profitable to operate this large, downtown building as a movie theatre. In the age of the automobile everyone owned cars. New theatres sprang up in shopping centres which offered cheaper rents. The Boulder Theater became a dilapidated building on a valuable piece of land, a prime candidate for demolition.

The story that I tell is typical. Some version of it has been played out in most cities and towns in America. And it is not just a story about movie theatres. Entire neighbourhoods are "redeveloped" out of existence in order to make way for freeways or office buildings. In the late 1960s in San Francisco, a Japanese neighbourhood was razed so that a Japanese cultural centre, catering mostly to tourists, including those from Japan, could be constructed. The story that I tell, then, is not just the story of one movie theatre in one town in Colorado. It is an example of an issue which is increasingly important in virtually every city in the country.

4.1 Economic Theory and Preservation

Having set the stage, we may now ask: what should be done with the Boulder Theater? For those who draw their policy prescriptions solely from economic considerations the answer is simple: use it in the most economically efficient way possible. Under prevailing conditions this is equivalent to saying that the Boulder Theater should be torn down and the land used as a parking lot. In recent years all across America a great number of landmarks have been replaced by parking lots. Downtown real estate is very expensive. Parking lots produce high revenue with low overheads at almost no risk.

Sometimes preservation can be made economically successful, however. San Francisco's Ghiradelli Square and Denver's Larimer Square are often cited as examples of economically successful preservations. Many believe that such preservations are and must be the way of the future. James Biddle, former president of the National Trust, has written: "We must show that preservations can be good for business. We can elaborate on aesthetic values, but we need to talk cold, hard cash." Still, some would deny that the models of economically successful preservation cited above are real preservations. Except for the building façades, very little has been preserved in either case. But even if the success of these examples is granted, as I think it should be, it is obvious that preservations cannot always be made commercially successful. For example, a thoroughgoing preservationist wants to preserve historic ethnic communities, however poor and deprived. Most of these areas will never be transformed into handsome tourist attractions.

Those who wish to preserve neighbourhoods, buildings, and other landmarks must, at some point, resolutely face their opponents and say that they reject economic efficiency as the ultimate criterion for social policy. In the current political climate such a declaration sounds shocking when put so boldly. Still, there is ample evidence that most Americans do reject economic efficiency as the sole criterion for social policy. Most Americans are committed to preserving endangered species and cleaning up the air and water even if this means that economic growth will be inhibited. Psychological research has indicated that in experimental situations people are willing to trade increments of efficiency for equality, fairness, and other values. What this means is that most people are irrational from the point of view of the economist. But we ordinary folk should not be too deeply stung by this charge. Economists use the terms 'rational' and 'efficient' in peculiar ways that are tailor-made to fit their favoured theory of rationality. Moreover, we can ask an economist some difficult questions about the importance he attaches to efficiency. That efficiency is a good cannot be doubted by any reasonable person. But some economists and the policy-makers and analysts that are influenced by them would justify all economic and social arrangements in

15 Anthony (1982).
17 McCallum and Rubel (1986).
terms of efficiency. What makes efficiency the primary virtue of social policies? The answer cannot be that efficient policies are efficient, for that reply would lead to a vicious circle. It must be that the economist believes that there are independent grounds for the primacy of efficiency. It is hard to imagine what they might be. And against this view, there are arguments that have been developed over thousands of years for the primacy of justice, respect, equity, and other moral virtues. We common folk who believe that sometimes efficiency must take a back seat to other values should not be cowed by the epithets of economists.

The gospel of efficiency, then, can be rejected in a principled way by the preservationist. But this rejection of efficiency does not in itself show that the Boulder Theater or any other landmark ought to be preserved. That task requires some positive arguments on behalf of preservation.

4.2 What is a Landmark?

Before considering these arguments we should be clear about what we mean by 'landmark'. I have been using the term very broadly so that it encompasses buildings, neighbourhoods, monuments, and so forth. But of course not all such things are landmarks. The tract house in Southern California in which I was raised is not a landmark. Nor is the suburb of which it is a part. Another difficulty is that some definitions of 'landmark' imply that they are now being preserved or that they ought to be. Some even include the reasons for such preservation as part of the definition. For example, the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines 'landmark' as "a building or site having historical significance and marked for preservation by a municipal or national government" (emphasis added). Since we want to discuss some buildings, neighbourhoods, and so forth that have not been marked for preservation by a government, and since we want to examine a wide range of arguments for such preservation, and not just historical ones, it is clear that we must use 'landmark' in a slightly different sense than that specified in the dictionary. Two points about our use of 'landmark' should be noted particularly. First, we shall count as a landmark anything that is a plausible candidate for preservation, relying on a stock of common-sense examples for purposes of discussion. This in our sense of 'landmark' it makes sense to say that something is a landmark but it ought to give way to something else. Secondly, we shall separate the question of whether something is a landmark from the grounds that might be cited for preserving it. We do not want it to be true by definition that landmarks must be preserved for historical or cultural reasons.

With these emendations in mind, we can go on to consider some arguments for preservation.

There are at least three kinds of arguments that can be given for preservation. The first kind appeals to characteristics of the landmarks themselves. I shall consider two examples: the Argument from the Rights of Landmarks, and the Argument from Aesthetic Features. A second kind of argument for preservation rests on duties to persons other than ourselves. The Argument from Duties to Future Generations and the Argument from Duties to Past Generations illustrate this kind of argument. A third kind of argument for preservation is rooted in considerations about those who presently exist. The Argument from Cultural Identity and the Argument from Common Wisdom will be my examples.

4.3 The Argument from the Rights of Landmarks

The first kind of argument that we distinguished appeals to characteristics of the landmarks themselves as the grounds for why we should preserve them. The most far-reaching of these arguments is the Argument from the Rights of Landmarks. This argument purports to show that it is wrong to destroy landmarks because they have a right to exist independently of human desires or preferences. This argument strikes some people as ludicrous and others as obvious. But to properly evaluate it, we must view it from the perspective of contemporary theories of rights.

In recent years rights to almost everything have been posited by someone. And almost every class of entity has its champions. Two decades ago most people would have ridiculed the claim that animals have rights. But today advocates of animal rights are an important influence on contemporary thought and action. Also in the last two decades environmentalists have begun to argue that natural objects like rivers and trees have rights as well. Legal theorist Christopher Stone argued that rights could be extended to natural objects on the basis of well-established legal principles. Although Stone remains a minority voice, his arguments were sympathetically received by the late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. Some have tried to carry Stone's argument even further, arguing that artefacts like works of art also have rights. Perhaps it is absurd to ascribe rights to urban landmarks, but if it is, at least it is an absurdity that is in keeping with the tenor of the times.


For criticism of this view, see Garding and Garding (1979).
How might one argue that urban landmarks have rights? The first stage of the argument would establish some favourable condition that is sufficient for having rights. A long tradition in both moral and legal philosophy holds that having interests is sufficient for having rights. This condition seems more favourable to the preservationist than the oft-cited alternatives of being autonomous or being a party to a contract. It can be argued on the basis of this "interest principle" that infants and comatose humans have rights. It is also easy to see how rights could be extended to non-human animals on the basis of this principle; just as humans have an interest in a long and pleasant life, so do the other higher animals. But what about artefacts like paintings and buildings? Do they have interests? It is true that we often speak of them as if they do. We might say that we "feel sorry" for the house next door since it has been purchased by an irresponsible owner who does nothing to keep it in repair. Or we might say that it was "a good thing" for the paintings in the National Gallery in London that they were evacuated to the countryside before the German bombing began. But on reflection I think we can see that these are not literal uses of language. When a raccoon is hit by a car, we may or may not be disturbed by it; but it is clearly bad for the raccoon. But if a historical landmark is razed and we are not disturbed by it, either for ourselves or for future or past generations, there seems little sense in saying that it was bad for the landmark that was razed. To put the point another way, if there were no other sentient beings in the universe it would still be a bad thing that an animal suffered and died, but it would not be a bad thing that an earthquake swallowed up the ruins of the Roman Colosseum.

The argument I have presented against supposing that artefacts have rights is mainly intuitive and therefore not overwhelming in its strength. But on the other hand the only argument that I have seen in favour of this view rests on an equivocation, as I have tried to show. That is, it rests on supposing that artefacts have interests in the same sense in which humans and other animals do. Until better arguments are presented, the intuitive considerations that I have given seem strong enough to carry the day.

4.4 The Argument from Aesthetic Features
A second example of an argument which grounds the duty of preservation in characteristics of the landmarks themselves is the Argument from Aesthetic Features. This argument is often cited in everyday discussions of preservation. It gains plausibility from the fact that some of the legislation concerning landmark preservation directly appeals to the aesthetic features of landmarks as the grounds for their preservation. For example, the criteria of eligibility for being listed in the National Register of Historic Places explicitly lists high artistic value as one consideration. This suggests that perhaps landmarks ought to be preserved because they embody valuable aesthetic features.

There are two problems with this argument even if it is viewed in a favourable light. First, this argument fails to provide grounds for preserving many landmarks that many people believe ought to be preserved. Houses in which presidents were born rarely embody valuable aesthetic features. Inner-city neighbourhoods seldom have much in common with works of art. Secondly, rather than motivating preservation, this argument only challenges developers to do better. If our interest in landmarks is an aesthetic one, then no one can complain if we destroy a landmark, so long as we replace it with a structure that is aesthetically more pleasing. Such a policy might lead to an environment which is aesthetically more rewarding but one which many of us would believe had lost something important.

There are two more problems with this argument. First, many philosophers believe that aesthetic judgements are objective, but they have not done a good job of convincing other people of this. As a matter of practice, when aesthetic value is debated in the realm of public policy there is a strong tendency for anyone's opinion to be regarded as the equal of anyone else's. As the proverbial (but possibly false) saying goes, "There is no disputing matters of taste." Many people seem to like the Golden Arches, and find the clean austere look of modern office buildings vastly more pleasant than the aesthetic qualities of crumbling warehouses. Secondly, most people, and certainly most decision-makers, regard aesthetic value to be commensurable with other values. That is, most people would trade an increment of aesthetic value for an increment of some other value, say convenience or economic welfare. Thus someone might admit that an office building from the 1920s is aesthetically superior to the one that has been proposed to replace it, but at the same time prefer the proposed building because of the greater convenience it would afford (e.g., better lighting, better plumbing, better electricity, and so forth). Although the Argument from Aesthetic Features provides some reason for preserving some landmarks, it is only of slight help in establishing a thoroughlygoing preservationist position.

4.5 The Argument from Duties to Future Generations
The second category of arguments for preservation appeals to our duties to those who are not now alive. The first example of such an argument that we shall consider is the Argument from Duties to Future Generations. The basic idea is that we deprive members of future generations from experiencing the
landmarks that we destroy. The fact that they come after us in time gives us no warrant to deny them these pleasures. Therefore it is wrong for us to destroy landmarks.

Two criticisms of this argument merit our attention. First, it must be recognized that virtually everything we do deeply affects members of future generations. Indeed what we do even affects the identity of who will exist in the future.öh The slightest change in the remote past would have made it highly unlikely that we would now exist. Look at it this way. A necessary condition for my existing is that I originated in the union of a unique sperm and a unique egg. If my mother had stubbed her toe on the way to bed on the night of my conception, I would not have been conceived. For if a child would have been conceived an instant later it would have originated from a different sperm uniting with the egg. The result might have been someone very much like me, as much like me as my brother is, but still a different person. Once we see the radical contingency of our existence, it is obvious that different policies concerning historical preservation would result in different people being born in the future. If we raze a building instead of preserving it, some construction worker has a job who would not otherwise have one. Instead of staying at home and conceiving a child he is out destroying a building. The child whom he does conceive when he returns home from work, who would not otherwise have existed, marries and has children. Her children would not have existed had she not existed. It is easy to see that after several generations the planet would be populated by people who would not have existed had we adopted a different policy concerning historic preservation.

On the face of it, this argument undercuts the Argument from Duties to Future Generations. The problem is that this argument, if successful, would seem to show that we have no duties at all to future generations; an implication many would find unacceptable. (As for why, see the discussion of the Doomsday device in section 4.6.) It would take us too far afield to properly evaluate this argument, but whether or not it is sound, there is a second argument that serves to diminish the force of the Argument from Duties to Future Generations, one that does not imply that we have no duties to them.

I have already argued that preservation is, to a great extent, economically inefficient. If that were not the case we could trust preservation to the free market, since the free market, at least under certain ideal conditions, guarantees efficient outcomes.öô Wherever we preserve a landmark for future generations which would otherwise be destroyed if the market were permitted to operate freely, we are effectively depriving future generations of some economic advantage. It is one thing for us to say that if we lived in the future we would prefer an increment of preservation to an increment of economic welfare, but how do we know what people who live in the generations after us will prefer? Doubtless they will prefer many of the same things we do—health rather than sickness, for example, and clean water rather than mud. So, assuming that we have some duties to future generations, we can allow that we have the duty not to leave them a world that seriously jeopardizes their health or is devoid of clean water. But our degree of certainty on these matters is not easily transferable to convictions about the preferences of future people for landmark preservation rather than extra increments of economic welfare. Positivity might view our landmarks as symbols of a rapacious and disgusting civilization. They might prefer to begin anew. We simply do not know and, in the nature of the case, we can never know.

It might be objected that I have overstated our uncertainty about the preferences of future generations. We know that we are happy that landmarks have been preserved for us, and therefore, it might be argued, we have good inductive evidence for supposing that future people will be happy if landmarks are preserved for them. It is important to remember, however, that cultural preferences can and do change radically, often in a very short time. For example concerns with respect to wilderness. The contemporary historian Roderick Nash has documented the radical shift in American perceptions of wilderness over the last three centuries. For the Puritans wilderness was "poor, barren, hideous, boundless, and unknown"; for the contemporary environmentalist it is a source of wisdom which "holds answers to questions man has not yet learned how to ask."öö Even in the case of urban preservation popular attitudes have changed dramatically in the last decade. In the 1960s urban renewal programmes destroyed large numbers of important buildings in the downtown sections of most American cities. What opposition there was to these programmes came mostly from political conservatives objecting to the role of government in these projects. But nowadays many people, regardless of their views on other issues, see the urban renewal of the 1960s as a great
national tragedy. Moreover, our lack of knowledge concerning the preferences of future generations is particularly troublesome when coupled with the fact, already noted, that a great extent preservation is a good that is provided to future generations at the price of some increment of their economic welfare. Perhaps there is a strong inductive case for the urgency of people's preference for preservation, but there is an even stronger case for the urgency of their preference for economic welfare. In the end, then, the Argument from Duties to Future Generations fails to be convincing because of the indeterminacy of the preferences of future generations, even if it is true, as we have allowed, that we have some duties to those who will live after us.

At this point, it might be countered that it doesn't matter what future generations would prefer, what matters is what is good for them; and preservation of landmarks would be good for them. This argument is really a version of two other arguments, the Argument from Cultural Identity and the Argument from Common Wisdom, and it will be taken up when we discuss those arguments (in sections 4.7 and 4.8, respectively).

4.6 The Argument from Duties to Past Generations

The second argument that we shall consider which locates our obligation to preserve landmarks in duties to persons other than ourselves is the Argument from Duties to Past Generations. The basic argument is very simple. When people construct buildings, create neighbourhoods, make public sculptures, and so forth, they do these things with an eye to their creations continuing beyond their deaths. Although there is no explicit intergenerational agreement to preserve the creations of the past, still, we have a duty to respect the preferences and desires of our ancestors.

One objection to this argument should first be put to rest. It might be thought that we do not have duties to the dead because the desires of the dead die with them. Consider an example. My father is on his deathbed. I promise him that I will never sell a family heirloom. As soon as he dies I rush to the antique shop and cash in. Have I violated a promise? No, it might be suggested, it doesn't make sense to think of the promise as existing after the death of my father. If I have an obligation to someone, it must be the case that the person in question exists, and though my father once existed he doesn't exist now. Thus, a necessary condition for having an obligation does not obtain and there can be no obligation.

This line of argument is very tempting. It does seem strange to suppose that interests, desires, preferences, intentions, or hopes survive the deaths of their subjects. But supposing they do not is stranger still. If, for example, a promise dies with the person to whom the promise is made, what could be the point of promising someone that you will take care of his children or protect his art collection? At best such "promises" are exercises in collective self-deception. At worst they are a cruel hoax. But in addition to making nonsense of our commitments to the dying, this view threatens to make nonsense of duties to future generations as well. If a necessary condition for having a duty to someone is that she exists, then surely we can have no duties to future people since they do not exist now any more than do the dead. But if we were now to construct a Doomsday device that would explode in the year 2100, surely it is plain that by our actions here and now we would have wronged future people. These considerations suggest that a "timeless" view of morality might be correct. Just as someone's location in space is not in itself sufficient for removing him from the domain of moral concern, so it is with his location in time. That the dead were once alive and that future people will be alive is enough to make them the proper objects of moral concern.

Although this objection against the Argument from Duties to Past Generations founders, there are other objections which fare better. First, it is often far from clear what the intentions and desires of those who lived in the past were. Not every architect and builder cared whether or not his work lived on after his demise; indeed, some continue to build and design with an eye to planned obsolescence. Moreover, even if without exception all of the geniuses of the past cared about the persistence of their creations, a difficult question remains concerning how their hopes, wishes, and desires generate duties on our part. This difficult question can be illustrated by the following examples.

Suppose that you are sunbathing by a lake on a fine summer day. Several feet from shore there is a child drowning. Suppose that you could save the child with very little risk or even inconvenience to yourself. Moreover, only you are in a position to save the child; there is no one else around. It seems clear that in this case you have a duty to save the drowning child, even though you never agreed to undertake this duty. Now consider quite a different case. You return home one day to find your bicycle parked on your porch. There is a note saying that I have decided to sell it to you and that you owe me $300. You might justly protest, denying that you owe me this money on the grounds that you never agreed to buy my bike. After all, I cannot impose an obligation on you simply by intending that you acquire it and behaving accordingly.

Which of these cases is most similar to the supposed duty to preserve the creations of the past? It is difficult to say. Like the first case, only we are in a
position to save the creations of our ancestors. But unlike the first case, it seems that in order to do this we sometimes would have to be willing to pay quite a price. How important is the interest that our ancestors have in the preservation of their creations? Is it a very deep and serious interest, like the interest in life that the drowning child has? Or is it a relatively frivolous interest, like my interest in selling you my bike? These are difficult questions which cannot easily be answered. It is clear, however, that it is very problematical to suppose that the intentions and desires of those who lived in the past are sufficient to impose on us a duty to preserve their creations.

It is also worth noting that even if these considerations about past generations do generate duties of preservation on our part, it is not clear that they lead to conclusions consistent with our considered judgement about the relative stringency of these duties. Most of us believe that whatever duties we have to past generations become weaker with the passage of time. If we owe anything to past generations at all, we owe more to the last generation than to the one which lived in 2000 BCE. I may have a stringent duty to my father not to sell the family jewels, but my duties to my ancestors seventeen generations removed are surely not so stringent. Yet for the preservationists, the urgency of preservation seems to increase with the passage of time. If, then, the duty to preserve is grounded in obligations to past individuals, it would seem that the most stringent duty would be to preserve the most recent landmarks even if this would mean destroying more ancient ones—for example, preserving the Athens Holiday Inn at the time of the deterioration of the Acropolis. There is a counter-argument that one might give, however. It might be suggested that our duty is often to preserve older landmarks at the expense of newer ones because we have duties to more people concerning old landmarks than we do concerning new ones. We owe it to the builders of the Acropolis to preserve it, but we also owe this duty to all who have lived between then and now who have wanted the Acropolis preserved. For this reason the duty to preserve old landmarks is often more stringent than the duty to preserve new ones, even though duties do become less stringent with the passage of time.

These considerations are, so far, inconclusive. I have rejected one plausible objection to the Argument from Duties to Past Generations. In addition I have suggested that it is unclear whether the intentions and desires of our ancestors are sufficient for imposing on us duties to preserve their creations. I then pointed out that even if this argument was successful it might imply that landmarks ought to be preserved in roughly the reverse order of priority than most preservationists would argue. There is one remaining objection to the Argument from Duties to Past Generations. It is the one which I believe has the most force.

If it were the case that we have a duty to preserve the creations of our ancestors because of their preferences and desires, then we would have a duty to preserve everything and anything that they wanted us to preserve. If, for whatever reasons, they wanted us to preserve theirouthouses and storm cellars, but didn't care at all whether we preserved their paintings and cathedrals, then we would be duty-bound only to preserve these mundane objects. Similarly, if we desired that toxic waste dumps and automobile burial grounds should be our gift to future generations, then those who come after us would have a duty to preserve them. This seems perverse. After all, it is the present generation who must live with the legacy of the past. Perhaps respecting the preferences of our ancestors is a good "first cut" at determining what ought to be preserved. Perhaps it would even be very nice of us to preserve what they want us to preserve. But it cannot be that we have a duty to them to do this. For what ought to be preserved surely turns on the properties of the things in question and their impacts on the lives of those living now. To suppose otherwise is to enslave those now alive to the known tastes and preferences of those who have gone before or to the unknown tastes and preferences of those who will come afterwards.

In short, then, although in principle those who live in the present have duties to the dead, there is no good reason for supposing that we have any specific duty to preserve the creations of the past because we owe it to those who have gone before. The Argument from Duties to Past Generations fails to provide a convincing foundation for preservation.

4.7 The Argument from Cultural Identity

The final category of arguments that I shall consider roots our obligation to preserve landmarks in considerations about people who are now alive. One such argument frequently heard is popular discussion is that preserving landmarks is necessary for preserving our cultural identity. The usually unargued assumption that lies in the background is that preserving our cultural identity is a good thing.

We might begin by asking what it means to have a cultural identity. Perhaps the words of Josiah Royce quoted earlier in this essay (Section 1.1) suggest an answer. People with a cultural identity "idealize", "ador" and "ensnoble" their communities. They educate their children in the history and traditions of their culture. They preserve and protect their language, literature, and native arts. They do what they can to help those who are also members of their culture.

Assuming that this is roughly what it means to have a cultural identity, we may then go on to ask why it is a good thing to have one. This is not an easy question to ask, much less answer, in the contemporary climate. In the 1960s...
The promotion of cultural identity was widely considered to be an important step in the liberation of America's oppressed minorities. In the 1970s, the fascination with cultural identity spread beyond African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans to encompass people of virtually every ethnic and cultural background. Many of our recent novels, films, and television programmes, ranging from Roots to Mean Streets, assert the importance of cultural identity. Perhaps even the current religious revival can be explained in part by a yearning for a common cultural identity in a pluralistic and fragmented society.

If we seriously ask why cultural identity might be a good thing, two answers suggest themselves. The first focuses on the individual. It might be argued that cultural identity is important for human happiness and welfare. Humans are, after all, cultural animals. When we have no strong cultural background to identify with, we tend towards the dysfunctional. We become rootless and unrooted. Though we may survive, we do not flourish. The second answer focuses on the society rather than the individual. A society in which individuals have a cultural identity is one in which people are more likely to cooperate and pursue common goals. A society which is unified in purpose and principle is one which is better for everyone to live in.

The first of these answers involves a difficult empirical claim. Whether or not people with a cultural identity are happier or more functional than those without such an identity is a matter for psychological investigation. It would not be an easy investigation to undertake, however, for such murky notions as "having a cultural identity" or "being functional" would have to be made operational. Since there is reason for despair about the possibility of empirically verifying or falsifying this claim, we might as well do some speculating.

There is some reason to believe that people with a cultural identity might be happier and more functional than those without one. People with a cultural identity have more clearly defined roles. What is expected of them is not in doubt. What is of meaning and significance is given by shared cultural norms. But just as there is reason for supposing that cultural identity is conducive to happiness and being functional, so there is reason for believing that it is not. Societies in which people have a strong sense of cultural identity are often intolerant and repressive. Such societies force individuals into moulds not of their own choosing. It is important to remember that cultural identity, which has the ring of something good, is the near neighbour of chauvinism and jingoism, both of which are clearly evil.

The second answer to our question is that a society in which people have a cultural identity is one in which people are more likely to cooperate and to pursue common goals. Two very different kinds of societies in which people might have a deep sense of cultural identity must be distinguished, however. The first kind is one which is homogeneous, and most people share a common cultural identity. Contemporary Poland, a country with few ethnic minorities in which almost everyone is Roman Catholic in religion, might be an example of this kind of society. The second kind of society is one which is pluralistic. In this kind of society most people have a cultural identity, but there is no common cultural identity which they share. Perhaps the United States is, or once was, an example of this kind of society. It could be argued that Italians, Jews, Blacks, and so forth all have a strong sense of cultural identity, but that their identities are as Italian-Americans, Jewish-Americans, African-Americans, and so forth. It is easy to see why cultural identity in the first kind of society would be conducive to widespread cooperation and the pursuit of common goals. It is difficult to see why this would be so in the second kind of society, however.

Some would surely wish to question the very idea that widespread cooperation and the pursuit of common goals is a good. They would point out that those societies with evil purposes and corrupt goals are all the worse for the unity they exhibit. If there must be a Nationalist Japan or a Nazi Germany, better they should be fragmented and disunited. Some would go even further and say that except in extraordinary circumstances it is better for all societies to lack widespread cooperation and the pursuit of common goals. They would say that a good society is one which permits individuals to realize their own projects and life-plans. Since there is a richness and diversity in the projects and life-plans of individuals, a good society would create conditions in which many such projects and plans may thrive. For a society to be unified, cooperative, and in pursuit of common goals implies that it is suppressing, overtly or covertly, the individual goals and projects of its citizens. In this view the role of a society is to enable those within it to flourish. There is no further mission for the society as a whole.

It should be clear that the Argument from Cultural Identity raises some interesting questions that are not easily resolved. The most important of these questions centre on (1) whether cultural identity is a good, (2) if it is, why it is, and (3) how important a good it is. Until we get a more convincing affirmative answer to the first, and compelling answers to the second and third questions, this argument remains unpersuasive.

One further question about this argument is worth asking. We have seen
that the case for supposing that cultural identity is important for human happiness and welfare is inconclusive, and that the case for cultural identity as conducive to cooperation and the pursuit of societal goals is most plausible when there is a common cultural identity widely shared within the society. What policy regarding landmark preservation would be advocated by someone who believed that engendering cooperation and the pursuit of common societal goals were important goods?

The most general answer is that he would favour a policy of preferring landmarks associated with the dominant culture over those associated with minority cultures. Indeed, if he considered cultural uniformity a very great good, he might advocate the destruction of minority landmarks, since they contribute to maintaining minority cultures which inhibit social unity. Historical landmarks commemorating national leaders and the major events in the history of the nation would be a major priority for preservation since, in this view, they help to define a culture. In the case of the United States, it is hard to see what else in the way of landmarks serves to define a common culture. Perhaps it is not entirely silly to suggest that the first McDonald’s hamburger stand in Des Plaines, Illinois, the first casino built in Las Vegas, and the largest used car lot in Texas would be landmarks worthy of preservation if we were to follow this policy, while the sacred burial grounds of Native American peoples and the architecture of the Shakers would be allowed to pass from view.

All of this taken together suggests that the Argument from Cultural Identity does not support a strong presumption in favour of landmark preservation.

4.8 The Argument from Common Wisdom

The final argument that I shall consider is the one which I think provides the most powerful reason for preserving landmarks. But before developing this argument, we need to take stock of what has already been done.

So far I have argued that we have no duty to past or future people to preserve landmarks. If we ought to preserve them it is because such preservation is good for us. I have further suggested that preservation is often not economically efficient, that appeals to the aesthetic features of landmarks are insufficient to support much preservation, and that considerations about cultural identity do not provide a clear and unambiguous case for preservation. We must rethink what our policy concerning landmarks should be. In order to do this in a way that results in a sensible landmarks policy, we must develop a sensible urban policy and in order to do that we must ask again what we want from our cities.

If we ask this question, I think the answer is obvious: we want our cities to provide an environment that is conducive to the good life. There are, of course, many different and competing conceptions of the good life. But most plausible conceptions share the view that the good life consists in qualitative goods as well as quantitative ones. To put the point in a different way, the good life cannot plausibly be defined just in terms of access to flush toilets or police protection; it most consider quality of life considerations as well. Although amenities like flush toilets probably bear on the quality of life for most of us, social, psychological, and emotional factors are at least as important. What I am suggesting is that we value cities not only for the material amenities they provide, but also for the possibilities they present for living a life of high quality, where high quality of life includes but does not exhaust the following security, community, self-respect, self-esteem, adequate housing, adequate nutrition, adequate health care, opportunities for education, recreation, cultural development, and so forth. The question of whether landmarks should be preserved ought to be answered by reference to the impact of such preservation on the quality of life of those who live among and within them.

The view that I wish to urge is that there is a strong presumption in favour of preserving landmarks because there is reason to believe that they are often part of a physical and cultural ecology which is conducive to the living of high-quality lives. Before trying to say what might follow from this about landmarks policy, it is important to consider what arguments can be given for the view. Like most arguments that concern landmark preservation, they are fragmentary and less conclusive than one might wish. Still, they seem to me to carry considerable weight. The first argument is really a negative one. As long as there have been cities, most attempts at central planning and redevelopment have only made things worse; and therefore, generally speaking, it is better to let well enough alone. The recent American experience is an instructive example.

Footnotes:
22 Shortly after writing these words the following news item came to my attention: “Threatened: The first McDonald’s fastfood restaurant, a sleek drive-in hamburger stand in Des Plaines, Ill., was opened by Ray Kroc in 1955. Nearby 3,000 McDonald’s and 60 billion hamburgers later, the parent corporation says that the seated facility is too small and outdated and will be replaced in the spring. However, McDonald’s may move the building to create a “theme park of fast food.” (Preservation News, Feb. 1983: 12).
As we noted in the introduction, as long as there have been cities in America, there have been those who have thought them to be in crisis. By the end of World War II many people thought the situation had become intolerable. People and wealth were increasingly moving to the suburbs. The central cities could not compete successfully with suburban shopping centres, and their economic base was declining. The housing stock in the central cities was inferior to that of the suburbs and was rapidly degenerating. In 1949 Congress passed the Housing Act which for the first time guaranteed a "decent home" for every American family. The mechanism was to be an unprecedented partnership between the public and private sectors. The Housing Act provided for the creation of urban renewal authorities empowered to assemble large tracts of urban land by negotiation or condemnation. The authorities would develop land-use plans, and then sell these tracts to private developers who were willing to build in accordance with the plans. In 1954 urban renewal authorities were also granted the power to develop commercial areas as well as housing.

From the beginning urban renewal was plagued by controversy. Political conservatives objected to the cost of the programme, the role of government in planning, and the power of urban renewal authorities to condemn land. Many liberals saw urban renewal as a programme designed to bring middle and upper-class people back to central cities, rather than as a programme designed to improve the lot of the city's working-class inhabitants. Some people saw urban renewal as a mechanism for distributing wealth away from small landowners and business executives to large corporations and developers. Others simply thought the projects were ugly. Although many well-intentioned and compassionate people favoured urban renewal at the outset, the consensus now seems to be that this programme was at best a mistake and at worst a tragedy.

The problem, quite simply, is that, like natural ecosystems, urban networks are very complicated and interdependent; and it is extremely difficult to anticipate all of the consequences of one's actions. Very often urban renewal disrupted and displaced stable neighbourhoods that were old and traditional. It destroyed small businesses and dispersed friends and relatives. Corner drugstores, taverns, churches, social halls, and other places that provided the focus and maintenance of human communities and the pursuit of a high quality of life. An example is the redesign of Paris after the revolutions of 1848. Napoleon III was disturbed at how the narrow winding streets of Paris made it difficult to support urban uprisings with modern armies. He commissioned Haussmann to redesign the city in such a way that would make it difficult for the people ever again to control the city in defiance of the government. Haussmann's design was very successful, it has stood succeeding governments in good stead ever since, most recently in May of 1968. Had Haussmann been commissioned to do the same thing in New York, he probably would have done the same thing. In both cases the planners were ill-intentioned or malevolent. They simply did not know enough to carry out the projects which they had undertaken. As a society, we were quite ignorant about the character of urban life in the early days of the programme. But even if everything were known that could be known, there would still be reason to be sceptical of large-scale redevelopment. Human communities are fragile and sensitive. It is easier to destroy them than to create them. It is as difficult to transplant a traditional inner-city community to a high-rise housing project as it is to transplant an entire biological ecosystem (e.g. the Everglades) to an alien environment (e.g. Montana). This brings us to our second argument. Some might be tempted to dismiss the story about urban renewal that I have told as a special case. The problem is that the projects were not well done, it might be said, not that they were undertaken. Much has been learned from these failures. We will do better next time, and indeed we are doing better even now. Such optimism is not well-founded. Were we to look at a number of such programmes in a variety of countries, we would see that the fate of urban renewal in the United States is the norm rather than the exception. Large-scale redevelopment typically works only when planners have something in mind other than the maintenance of human communities and the pursuit of a high quality of life. An example is the redesign of Paris after the revolutions of 1848. Napoleon III was disturbed at how the narrow winding streets of Paris made it difficult to support urban uprisings with modern armies. He commissioned Haussmann to redesign the city in such a way that would make it difficult for the people ever again to control the city in defiance of the government. Haussmann's design was very successful, it has stood succeeding governments in good stead ever since, most recently in May of 1968. Had Haussmann been commissioned to
redesign Paris with a view to enhancing the quality of life of its inhabitants, the failures of other planners are an omen of his chances of success. Like wil­
fully setting out in pursuit of happiness, the intention seems almost certain
to guarantee its own frustration.

It is no accident that most ambitious redevelopment programmes fail. Traditional buildings and neighbourhoods are the results of many small deci­
sions by many ordinary people. Buildings have been constructed with the
purpose of their users in mind. And when they have not been, over a long
period of time people turn these buildings to their ends. A common wisdom
is expressed in vernacular architecture and "unplanned" cities. It is the col­
lective wisdom of several generations. It is not easy for any single individual
to grasp and articulate this wisdom. The "planning" that is implicit in these
traditional structures is likely to embody more subtle distinctions and make
possible more worthwhile connections, like the rugs woven by entire families
in Afghanistan and Tibet, than any comparable structures that are invented
by a planning firm after a month or year of thought. The traditional struc­
tures have, after all, stood the test of time. They have survived as long as they
have because, at least to some degree, they are adequate to the purposes of the
people who have made them and use them. This is more than we can be sure
of when we commission planners to rebuild our cities.

The best reason for preserving landmarks, then, is that they embody the
common wisdom of those who have built them, lived in them, worked in
them, and played in them. They are likely to permit greater community,
liberty, security, and so forth, and to make possible a higher quality of life than
anything we might invent. This is not to say that the last word in urban plan­
ing ought to be the preservation of what has survived. It is to say that it
should be the first word, and a word to which we all too often have been deaf.

I have suggested that there is a presumption that urban landmarks should
be preserved because they are part of a pattern of life which is more conducive
to a high-quality human existence than anything we are likely to invent
or replace them. This perspective suggests that, whenever possible, landmarks
should be preserved as part of an urban system and not just as idle curiosi­
ties. What is valuable about landmarks is their role in human life, and that
can be destroyed as effectively by isolating them as by razing them. For all its
publicity and acclaim, the French Quarter of New Orleans, for example, is a
heart without a body, a mere shadow of its former self. It is a place to visit it
is not a place to live. If we must choose between preserving a landmark that
is part of a viable living system or one that is of greater aesthetic value but is
not part of such a system, it may well be best to prefer the former. Landmarks
are more than the sum of their own parts; they are also, in part, the sum of
their relations to the ways of life around them.

It is well to remember that the considerations that have been given create
only a presumption in favour of preservation. There are many other concerns
which we have, ranging from distributive justice to environmental protection.
These concerns might weigh against preservation in particular cases. A viable,
comprehensive policy concerning landmark preservation would have to
provide a mechanism for weighting these competing interests. To develop
such a policy is beyond the most modest ambitions of the present essay. Even
so, one can say that the argument I have given does not give preservationists
everything they want. Nevertheless, it gives them as much as they are entitled
to; and, I think, it makes the strongest case for preservation that can reason­
ably be sustained.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that the Argument from Common
Wisdom, in addition to making the strongest case for preservation that can
reasonably be sustained, also encompasses many of the concerns reflected in
the other arguments which we have considered. What more respect can we
show for the dead than a deep appreciation for the fundamental structures of
human life which they have bequeathed to us? What better gift could we give
to the future than cities which are not just liveable in, but also make possible
the development of all that is best in human life, taken both individually and
collectively? And surely nothing could be a better symbol of our cultural iden­
tity than cities which protect diversity but also encourage community. Since
we are creatures with an aesthetic sensibility, we can be confident that what
permits us to thrive will not deeply transgress our sense of beauty. Finally,
although landmarks do not have rights, their contribution to the good life is
so basic and pervasive that they should enjoy relative autonomy from the
passing whims and fancies of urban design.

5. THE PLACE OF UTOPIAN THINKING

Throughout this essay I have argued that, at least when it comes to urban
problems, it is usually better to trust the everyday decisions of ordinary people
rather than the social engineering of the experts. I have argued that the tools of
economic analysis, so well-entrenched in the bastions of policy-making, are
not always adequate for constructive and creative thinking about urban en­
vironmental problems. I have argued in particular that the strongest reason
for preserving landmarks is not any of the reasons commonly cited, but rather
it is because the common wisdom of generations of builders and users
working on a piecemeal basis is likely to result in structures that are more conducive to human flourishing than anything that city planners are likely to come up with in their armchairs or at their drawing tables. These conclusions might suggest that there is no place for "unordinary" people, those with utopian visions about what cities ideally can and should be. But that would be wrong.

Utopian thinking about cities is important for a number of reasons. Before discussing these reasons, however, it is important to understand the character of such thinking. Utopian thinking about cities is a form of social theorizing and social criticism. The idea that there is a connection between the physical structures of communities and their social lives is an ancient one. This idea has been especially influential in the United States. During the nineteenth century, many different sects, including the Shakers, the Mormons, and the True Inspiration Congregations, developed distinctive forms of architecture and community planning that were regarded as specially related to the moral and religious beliefs of the community. Even the communal movement of the 1900s was associated with its own distinctive architecture and planning, most notably the geodesic dome and the "Blueprint for a Communal Environment," a document produced by members of several Berkeley community organizations. Generally speaking, architecture and planning in the twentieth century have been dominated by thinkers with a utopian vision. Some were crackpots like Hitler, tinkering with his models and sketches of a new Berlin while the old one was bombarded by the Allies. Others seem merely fainthearted, like Paoli Soleri, who labours on in his attempt to create the utopian city of Arcosanti in the middle of the Arizona desert. But others have been very influential in practicing architects and planners, perhaps none more than the French architect Le Corbusier and the English planner Ebenezer Howard.

Le Corbusier's vision in the 1900s, like many of his contemporaries in painting, sculpture, and interior design, was the Modernist one. Existing cities were crowded, confused, insanitary, and irrational. They were to be swept away. We would begin anew building in concrete and steel, exploiting the possibilities for efficiency and standardization created by new technologies. Le Corbusier's vision is revealed most clearly in his plan for the reconstruction of central Paris. Everything was to be destroyed, save only a handful of isolated historic landmarks. The new centrepiece was to be a series of sixty-floor office buildings, each stripped of any ornamental detail, each sited on its own piece of land. This complex of office buildings was to be serviced by a number of high-speed transportation routes carrying workers to their jobs. Outside the central core was to be a series of apartment buildings, each of the same height, every one the same. Le Corbusier conceived of the city as a "tool for living". The purpose of design and planning was to make these tools as efficient as possible. This could be done by making everything as uniform and geometrically perfect as could be. Le Corbusier also saw the need for interaction with nature. For that reason each building was to be sited on its own patch of green. There is a vision of human life and society in Le Corbusier's utopian dreams. It is the vision of uniformity and efficiency. It is the vision of human life as just another job to be completed. It may not be a vision we like very much, but it is one that has been extremely influential in the twentieth century.

Ebenezer Howard's vision was quite different. He was shocked by the ugliness and blight of the British industrial cities at the turn of the century. He thought nothing could be done with the old cities. The solution was to build new ones that were more adequate to human needs and desires. Howard proposed new cities of about 30,000, set on approximately 1,500 acres of land, surrounded by a greenbelt of farms and gardens. Beyond the greenbelt were the factories that provided the residents with employment. All the land was to be held in common and rented to its users.

The architecture and planning of Le Corbusier and Howard were rooted in different views about human life and human society. Le Corbusier was inspired by breakthroughs in science and engineering. Problems of planning were, for him, technical problems. A viable aesthetic would follow from the study of efficiency. Howard, on the other hand, was influenced by the tradition of utopian socialism. His mission was to harmonize capital and labour, city and country, factory and farm, in practice and not just in theory.

For all their genius, the influence of Le Corbusier and Howard has not always been salutary. The monuments to Le Corbusier are the cold, faceless skyscrapers that now dominate the downtown sections of most of our cities. Howard's legacy is the sprawling suburbs that surround them.

Still, there is a place for utopian thinking about cities. While our traditional patterns of building, our collective wisdom, often embody diversity and toleration, they often embody less noble characteristics as well. After all, today's innovation becomes part of what preservationists might seek to preserve and protect tomorrow. Here is an example. Most people today would say that we should "design with nature". It would be best for our streets to follow the natural contours of the land and to respect the prominent features of the natural environment. Yet most American cities were originally laid out
according to a grid, regardless of the topography. If a hill or a swamp or a river got in the way, it was filled in, bulldozed, or dynamited. If that was impossible, an uneasy and often unworkable truce was established. Preserving the original plans of most American cities would often mean preserving these attempts to dominate nature rather than to coexist with her. Not everything new is good; but neither is everything old. We must learn from the sins of our ancestors, and not complacently bequeath them to our children. Utopian thinkers, one might say, are the conscience of the ages speaking to us now.

How, practically, are utopian thinkers important? Their visions are important, first of all, because they sometimes result in ideas we can use. Le Corbusier made us acutely aware of the possibilities of new materials. Howard gave us the greenbelt, a concept which has become very important in the plans of many middle-sized communities. We need not buy everything these thinkers are selling in order to find something helpful.

Secondly, utopian thinking is valuable because it forces us to clarify our views about what cities are for and where we want them to go. Consider an example. In the introduction to their book *Communitas*, Percival and Paul Goodman (1960:4) write:

> For thirty years now, our American way of life as a whole has been subjected to sweeping condemnation by thoughtful social and cultural critics...

In this book we must add, alas, to the subjects of this cultural criticism the physical plant and the town and the regional plans in which we have been living so unsatisfactorily. We will criticize not merely the foolish shape and power of the cars but the cars themselves, and not merely the cars but the factories where they are made, the highways on which they run, and the plan of livelihood that makes those highways necessary.

This passage should make us think. Do we share the Goodmans' view of the automobile? Or is this just another example of pathological hatred of this symbol of middle-class life? If we disagree with the Goodmans, we should know why. If we agree with them, perhaps their book will extend and deepen our belief.

Finally, utopian thinking is important because it gives us a yardstick by which to measure our progress. It reminds us that we ought not to be satisfied with things as they are. Utopian thinkers remind us of what is possible, and of how far we have to go to make human life even remotely as good as it can be.

In conclusion, however, it is important to remember the major theme of this essay. In the end, the cities around us are the creations of ourselves and of our ancestors. They are the primary environments in which most of us live, and they are one of the most important gifts we will give our children. Although we are often told that urban problems are beyond our competence to control, we must not alienate our power and foreclose our responsibility to those welfare problems with their techniques. For all too often they twist the problems in order to fit their methods, rather than tailoring their methods to the problems that need to be solved. In its own way, urban life is as fragile as the ecosystems of the oceans and the environment of the California condor. Just as a proper humility is necessary for one who wishes to save a species or an ocean, so it is required for one who wishes to preserve what's best in urban life.
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DALE JAMIESON

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