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The Urbanist Ethics of Jane Jacobs

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ABSTRACT *This article examines ethical themes in the works of the celebrated writer on urban affairs, Jane Jacobs. Jacobs' early works on cities develop an implicit, 'ecological' conception of the human good, one that connects it closely with economic and political goals while emphasizing the intrinsic good of the community formed in pursuit of those goals. Later works develop an explicit ethics, arguing that governing and trading require two different schemes of values and virtues. While Jacobs intended this ethics to apply to all forms of productive activity, it is particularly illuminating when applied to her own urban ideas and activism.*

With the passing of Jane Jacobs in 2006, North America lost one of its most influential urban activists and writers. The years since then have seen many expressions of appreciation and assessment of her life's work, including numerous eulogies in the press, a retrospective exhibit of her work mounted by the Municipal Art Society (accompanied by a publication of essays in appreciation [Mennel *et al.*, 2007]), and the establishment of a civic award in her name by the Rockefeller Foundation. New monographs and documentaries on Jacobs' work, in both Canada and the United States, are currently in preparation—a sign that her relevance and popularity has waned little since she first achieved prominence in New York City some fifty years ago. Her 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, is routinely called a classic, and has been lauded as a piece of American literature (Fulford, 1992), both because of its success in challenging the assumptions behind large-scale post-war urban renewal programmes, and because the book makes its case for a human-scaled vision of urban vitality with a rich combination of commonsense insight and plain-spoken eloquence (Jacobs, 1993). The combination of this book and two subsequent volumes on related urban dynamics—*The Economy of Cities* and *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1969, 1984)—has been called Jacobs' 'urban trilogy' (Alexiou, 2006, p. 186) and forms what, in the recent assessments of her legacy, is regarded as the core of her contribution as a writer and a public intellectual.

In a new foreword written for the 1993 Modern Library edition of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs characterized the focus of her effort in that book as something analogous to the study of natural ecosystems. If a natural ecosystem is a set of 'physical-chemical-biological processes', then a city ecosystem

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might be characterized as a set of 'physical-economic-ethical' processes. In describing the book in these terms, Jacobs is not only explicating an implicitly ecological frame of mind that guides the inquiry, she is also making explicit another feature that is largely implicit in the text itself: that it has an ethical focus. To be sure, the ethical dimension in question cannot be separated from the 'physical' dimension of the city (i.e. urban design, technology, architecture, and related fields), nor from patterns of economic investment, exchange, development, and decline. Yet there is nonetheless an ethical vision at the heart of Jacobs' very practical-minded approach to promoting urban vitality. An embedded ethical vision of this sort is worth examination by anyone interested in applied ethics, but it has particular value for those wishing to develop a kind of applied ethics that responds to issues uniquely connected with human place-making, and, specifically, with urban places. Part of my purpose in the following pages, then, will be to make explicit some of the implicit ethical themes in Jacobs' urban thought. My interpretive task will be to connect her approach with certain familiar traditions in philosophical ethics without going so far as to characterize Jacobs as offering a moral theory of her own.

But there is another, and quite curious, dimension to this topic of ethics in Jane Jacobs. It is that she did also publish, in 1992, a book explicitly concerned with what she termed 'ethics in making a living', entitled *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (1992). Working papers for this book were presented at a conference at Boston College in 1987 and were published (along with contributions from other scholars and transcriptions of question sessions) as *Ethics in Making a Living: The Jane Jacobs Conference* (Lawrence, 1989). In these volumes Jacobs is indeed offering something like an explicit ethics—a moral theory—although not of a sort, perhaps, that would be immediately familiar to philosophers.

Systems of Survival is not a book specifically concerned with cities. In fact, it makes surprisingly little mention of them. The book is structured as a dialogue in which participants in a series of informal discussions formulate and defend the thesis that there are two distinct systems of values and virtues that guide nearly all human cooperation in productive life. One is the 'guardian syndrome', which applies to circumstances of ruling and governance, but also to a range of related or similar activities; the other is the 'commercial syndrome', which is normally to be found in the production and exchange of goods and services, but can appear also in circumstances that one might not immediately associate with production and sale. The discussion in the book aims to demonstrate the importance of recognizing the difference between these two syndromes, to indicate potential excesses of each, and to draw attention to the alarming conditions that can result when the two syndromes become conflated in ways that turn the virtues of one or both of the syndromes into vices.

While *Systems of Survival* was the only one of Jacobs' books that ever made a best-seller list, it has not received the same kind of attention, in the recent appreciations of her legacy, as has her urban trilogy. A key reason for this is, I believe, that the book does not help the reader to see how this explicit moral theory might relate to her earlier studies of urban life. One might say that in *Systems of Survival* she deliberately turns her attention away from the planners and politicians in order to take on the philosophers. Yet here, too, Jacobs does

not help the reader to see exactly where her theory fits in with the philosophical tradition in ethics, or how and why she chooses to take a different theoretical tack than most philosophers take. I suspect that it is for this reason that the book has garnered as little attention from philosophers as it has from professionals in urban affairs.

My own purpose in examining *Systems of Survival* is not to make sense of it within the large scope of philosophical ethics, but to interpret its main thesis in a way that connects it with the implicit ethical ideas of Jacobs' earlier 'urban ecology'. Whatever value the book may have for philosophy generally, it certainly has a value in augmenting the ethical dimension of Jacobs' own thinking on American cities. In highlighting this value, I am suggesting that it was perhaps a mistake for Jacobs to de-emphasize the relation of her moral theory to her urban studies. In contrast to her de-emphasis, then, I shall be emphasizing that connection, relating the ethics not only to her earlier writings but to the context in which they were first conceived—that is, her urban activism in New York City in the 1950s.

Everything that I shall have to say here has to do with what could be called 'the good of cities'. In part this has to do, of course, with what makes the functioning of cities fair and just, and in view of this fact I see Jacobs' approach as a liberal-democratic one, valuing an organization of society wherein individuals can pursue their own reasonable ends (and some foolish ones, as well) within a relatively neutral framework of justice. And yet Jacobs holds, as many liberal theorists do, that the choice of a neutral framework of justice does not imply that rational debates over the best way to live should be abandoned. On the contrary, concretely, a city cannot be a good place without a lively public discussion and debate about the good. It is within the context of such debates that one addresses questions of the value of community, the goals of various forms of economic production, and the virtues by which one makes useful contributions to a shared life. These subjects are the principal concern of all of Jacobs' writings.

The Attack on Modernist Urban Planning

The Death and Life of Great American Cities introduces itself as an attack 'on the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding' (Jacobs, 1993, p. 5). In one of the book's most famously provocative passages she doubts that cities can solve their problems with the help of billions more dollars; after all, she writes,

look what we have built with the first several billions: Low-income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace. Middle-income housing projects which are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life. Luxury housing projects that mitigate their inanity, or try to, with a vapid vulgarity. Cultural centers that are unable to support a good bookstore . . . Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders. Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities. (Jacobs, 1993, p. 6)

The modernist vision that Jacobs attacks accompanied the rise of the private-vehicle paradigm of urban transportation, the emergence of grand international style architectural designs, and the growth of federal and state governments as funding sources for large-scale urban development projects. Jacobs finds roots of the modernist vision in three urban planning trends. In the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth century Jacobs sees an attraction to an aesthetic of civic grandeur over livability and functionality. In the Garden City movement that had begun in England she sees an anti-urban attempt to reduce concentrations of people and to separate urban functions from one another. In the Radiant City ideal of French architect Le Corbusier, and the ideals of the International Congress of Modern Architecture, she finds a vision so aesthetically abstracted, so utterly dazzled by the futuristic beauty of gleaming skyscrapers and sweeping expressways, that it seemed to have forgotten everything that was ever known about what makes city spaces lively and keeps urban economies functioning (Jacobs, 1993, pp. 24–34).

Much of the power of Jacobs' attack derives from her first-hand experience of the more destructive tendencies of modernist planning. As an activist in Greenwich Village during the 1950s she had helped to organize residents to oppose a series of urban renewal projects, an opposition that was astonishingly successful in preventing the bisection of Washington Square Park by a major arterial, having the official 'slum' designation of the West Village removed, and blocking the creation of the planned Lower Manhattan Expressway (Alexiou, 2006; Fishman, 2007). The success of these opposition movements was remarkable because they had been conceived under the guidance and authority of Robert Moses. Moses was, at the time, considered an unstoppable force because he had spent forty years in public service solidifying his political power and establishing his reputation as the greatest builder of public works in American history. As Robert Caro argues in his famous biography of Moses, *The Power Broker* (1974), by the 1950s Moses felt little need to consult with anyone on his projects because he had found a way to create an essentially authoritarian political base within a democratic system. He had control of the legal foundations of his authority because he had, when working for the New York State Governor in the 1920s, drafted a good deal of the legislation that established the scope of the positions he later held (Caro, 1974, pp. 141, 172–175, 185–186, 306, 709). He had control of funding because public authorities that he had created continued to collect tolls and fees in perpetuity, while all federal funding for projects was managed by Moses in his position as 'Construction Coordinator' (Caro, 1974, pp. 360, 614–636, 706–707). He had control of public opinion because his record of opening hundreds of public amenities—pools, playgrounds, parks, and beaches—had won him the unwavering adulation of the press (Caro, 1974, pp. 238–239, 308–311, 378–379, 485, 569). Moses had control of elected officials because they could take credit for the series of popular projects that he completed at an amazingly rapid pace (Caro, 1974, p. 463). So it is especially significant that a series of grassroots campaigns could be successful in halting some of his most cherished projects.

If the ability of Moses to maintain power for so many decades depended in part on being a hero in the eyes of the press, that heroism depended in great measure on being perceived as living and working by an exceptionally high moral standard. Because Moses never sought to profit financially from his projects, and because so

many of them created obvious public benefits, he was perceived, Caro says, as being 'above politics' and 'on the side of the angels' (Caro, 1974, pp. 218, 263–264, 462–463, 567–575, 716–717, 902–903, 979–983). But in the 1950s when he was demolishing huge tracts of Manhattan for redevelopment and displacing thousands of residents, the public began to turn against him. There emerged the contrast of the 'good Moses' and the 'bad Moses' (Caro, 1974, pp. 19–20, 993–1039). Recent reassessments of the Moses legacy have called this idea of the 'bad' Moses an exaggeration, for the transformation of New York that he undertook was following solidly mainstream directions in American urban development. It was not he who created the trend towards automobile dominance in transportation or the preference for large-scale high-rise public housing projects (Ballon, 2007, pp. 94–96; Jackson, 2007, pp. 68–70). But a careful reading of Caro reveals an interpretation of the moral dimension of the Moses story that is more nuanced than any such exaggeration. In Caro's eyes, the *modus operandi* of Moses at the end of his career was not fundamentally different from the one at the beginning, though the cumulative growth of his power allowed him increasingly to exercise less restraint over the years.

Moses always justified everything he did in terms of the values of its results. He often asked, rhetorically, 'If the end doesn't justify the means, what does?' He famously loved to quote the French proverb, 'You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs' (Caro, 1974, p. 218). Those who admired his results, and especially the press, were inclined to follow him in this regard, rarely questioning the means that he employed. But Caro lays bare a host of practices that Moses regularly employed that were not only unethical, but, one should think, scandalously so. Key among these abuses was the habitual use of deception in many forms. In writing legislation, for example, Moses cleared a path to power for himself by burying language that enabled that power under heaps of legislative verbiage. By this means he tricked legislators into voting for provisions of which they were altogether unaware (Caro, 1974, pp. 141, 172–175, 185). As early as the 1920s it became routine for Moses to spend the whole of his allotted budget on part of a project and then to go back to ask for more money. He called this 'driving stakes', for once a project is begun officials find it more embarrassing to leave the project unfinished than never to have started it in the first place (Caro, 1974, pp. 220, 313, 392, 569). Yet this practice routinely involves lying to the public regarding the planned use of their taxes, and doing so to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. 'Driving stakes' also took the form of beginning projects (often by demolishing existing structures) before processes of approval were completed. So outrageous was Moses' use of this tactic that Mayor LaGuardia, on one occasion, called in the police to forcibly halt Moses' workers as they began an unapproved demolition project (Caro, 1974, pp. 448–451). Moses also kept files on people who might stand in the way of his projects, using men he called his 'bloodhounds' to collect potentially damaging information, which he used to destroy careers if necessary (Caro, 1974, 14–15, 471–474, 502–503, 666–669).

In Moses' mind such tactics were justified by the good of the ends. But had the public known the extent of them it is likely that they would have been morally outraged. Of course, this is why Moses worked very hard to keep the potentially unpopular aspects of his operations quiet. What Caro finds astounding is that members of the government and the press who knew of them were so complicit for so long.

An Alternative Vision of the Urban Good

Moses was an expert at marginalizing public opposition when it arose. He could successfully dismiss the protests by hundreds or even thousands as a matter of a few rabble-rousers 'stirring up the animals'. Jacobs realized that something more was needed, then, to oppose the juggernaut of Moses and his equivalents in cities across America. One had to recognize that the modernist ideal was a vision of the good, but one founded on an overly abstract aesthetic and a heavy dose of social engineering. The radiant city that Le Corbusier and others had begun to envision as early as the 1920s was motivated by populist and socialist ideas of sanitary, light-filled homes for every citizen. Its love of skyscrapers was inspired, in part, by the opportunity to cover huge portions of the urban landscape with parks and pedestrian paths, segregating motor traffic onto expressways (Le Corbusier, 1967). New building materials and technologies permitted unprecedented protection from the natural elements while creating access to nature for recreation. The new minimalist design aesthetic allowed beautiful buildings and furnishings to be mass produced, raising the standard of living for everyone at minimal cost. The modernism of this vision carries through to the rationalization of processes that are meant to bring it about. Efficient bureaucracy and the technology of communication could greatly shorten the distance between project inception and project completion.

But in this seductive vision of planned urban utopia, Jacobs argues, there is a degree of abstraction that undermines most of its good intentions. The radiant city is based on an order that makes sense from a distance—simplifying the variables of the urban chaos, sorting them into categories (such as housing, industry, open space, retail space, and traffic), separating them (by the procedure of zoning law), and arranging all of these separated functions on the drawing table in orderly and attractive ways. But in abstracting from the messy business in which city uses are all jumbled together, the planners have abstracted from what makes cities lively, interesting, and economically inventive. For Jacobs, I would go so far as to say, the very essence of a city must be expressed in terms of density and diversity. Cities are born out of the choice of settlers to live in close proximity in order to benefit from what they have to offer one another. Cities keep reinventing themselves out of the extraordinary innovation that results from massive numbers of people seeking those benefits. Thus the efforts of modern planners to separate city uses and thin out urban populations necessarily appears, in Jacobs' view, as *anti-city* planning. It aims to solve the problems of cities by compromising their essential functions.

In contrast, Jacobs demonstrates the value of mixing all sorts of urban uses together. Mixed uses on city streets (including residences, retail establishments, and places of work) can make the streets lively places where people who have a stake in the health of the neighbourhood are present at all different times of the day. The resulting mixture of people increases the serendipitous contact that establishes what the sociologists now call 'weak social ties', forming networks of people that can be politically organized when a neighbourhood seeks to take collective action (Jacobs, 1993, Chs. 2–5). A mixture of functions in urban districts attracts people to those districts for many reasons, with primary uses (e.g. housing, cultural institutions, office buildings) generating secondary uses (e.g. restaurants, shops, salons), keeping a range of uses within the district, thus contributing to its economic

strength and independence (Chs. 7–8). A mixture of buildings of different ages has more than the value of retaining the historic heritage of a city; it also creates important economic opportunities, for it is in old buildings that young artists and new businesses get their start (Ch. 10).

A vital mixture of such uses cannot be mandated by city governments, but it can be encouraged or discouraged (Jacobs, 1993, Chs. 21–22). The influence that can be made through zoning, building codes, design review boards, neighbourhood plans, tax incentives, and public works can all provide incremental support to the knitting up of the urban fabric. While investors, entrepreneurs, and markets will form the economic engine of development, governments can help moderate the kinds of market forces that frequently bring massive amounts of investment into a district. For when too much money comes into a district too fast it becomes impossible for many of the people and enterprises that first made that district an interesting place to remain in the district (Jacobs, 1969, Chs. 2–4; 1993, Ch. 16).

This vision of urban diversity and concentration that is being described here is a vision of the urban good. It is an ecological vision, one that conceives the ethical as always embedded in patterns of interrelated economic and political functioning. As is true of natural ecological systems, much of what is most important in this urban ecology is a function of the statistical chances of serendipity. The empirical study of cities, when undertaken from this ecological point of view, becomes a matter of observing where vitality is occurring and then doing the detective work to determine which of the variables in the situation are making key differences. The corresponding normative task becomes one of trying to increase the probabilities that the vitality will survive and improve. The ecological mentality also influences the attitudes that one will bring to the actions and policies that follow from these normative conclusions. One is less likely to do what the modernist planners did—envisioning an ideal pattern of life on the drawing table and then controlling as many variables as possible to make the city (and its citizens) fit the plan. One will be more likely to take a ‘best practices’ approach, trying to determine, from healthy urban ‘ecosystems’ (along with their patterns of development and decline), what sorts of incremental changes in urban policy and practice hold some promise of making a difference.

The ethical notion of autonomy also figures prominently in Jacobs’ implicit urban ethics, but less in its individual form than in a communal one: her emphasis on neighbourhood subsidiarity in the conduct of urban politics. No one understands what is good and bad for neighbourhoods better than the people who live and work in them. Effective city governments understand that they must inform their political power with the intelligence that comes from the concrete experience of the neighbourhoods. For this reason the political unit of the district becomes important for Jacobs because the district is large enough to represent community consensus to the city but small enough to build that consensus among neighbourhood organizations themselves. This notion of neighbourhood autonomy stands in sharp contrast to the rhetoric that Robert Moses and others used to marginalize neighbourhood opposition, rhetoric claiming that the neighbourhoods did not have a broad enough perspective on the common good, that they were selfish, putting their individual good over the common good (Lawrence, 1989, p. 187).

But it is precisely in these same patterns of neighbourhood and district functioning that Jacobs found a richer form of what philosophers in some Aristotelian traditions have called 'the common good'. Central to these traditions is the idea that the good is not simply realized in the practical ends achieved through social cooperation, but is just as importantly embodied in the quality of the human relations that are born of those patterns of cooperation. The community, which comes together to achieve practical ends, is also an end in itself—and is, in many ways, the most important end of all (Byrne, 1989). To characterize urban development as a problem of trade-offs between 'process' and 'product' is to miss this dimension of the good entirely. Deliberative processes that are fair and open, that create forums where citizens are given a voice and can develop more meaningful forms of cooperation, can contribute to the good of cities even when they fail to achieve their initial practical ends. The good, in such a case, takes the form of an improved quality of community life.

The moral weight that Jacobs gives to the values of urban diversity and density stands in stark contrast to the way that leaders of the urban renewal movement disparaged these qualities as 'urban chaos' and 'overcrowding'. It seemed to the champions of the Radiant City so much more rational to divide up the city into single-use zones. But eventually it became clear that this separation created a dullness in cities that made them less attractive places, causing greater dispersion of the population, and making economic activity more dependent than ever on motor vehicles.

Jacobs could not have anticipated what a moral watchword 'diversity' would become by the end of the twentieth century. Today the notion of diversity, in all of its forms, has become increasingly central to American notions of social justice. We emphasize the value of societies that are able to incorporate people of diverse geographical, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. But already in Jacobs' vision of urban economic and architectural diversity this dimension of cultural diversity was present, for the neighbourhoods that had been called 'slums' were frequently places where immigrant communities from all over the world were making their transition to life in a new society. The richness and fascination of this blend of cultures was, in her view, part of what made great American cities great (Berman, 1982, pp. 323–329).

The mainstream modernist approach also failed to grasp the good of urban density. It is true that the concentration of populations is a problem when communities develop patterns of interaction that put their members constantly at cross purposes. But when the patterns are successful, what we value most about cities is the concentration of people, a concentration that permits degrees of economic innovation and cultural activity that could not be supported any other way. More recent efforts at urban revitalization have turned once again to mixed-use, densely settled, pedestrian-oriented models of urban design as means of attracting urban residents who are drawn to the benefits of density (see, for example, Calthorpe, 1993; Katz, 1994; Kelbaugh, 1997). Again, Jacobs could not have anticipated how intensely relevant her ideas in this area would become in the present century, when rapidly mounting financial and environmental costs of petroleum-based transportation are creating an extraordinarily urgent demand for a fundamental shift in our ways of city-making. More than ever, the urgency acquires the tone of a moral imperative (see, for example, Light, 2003; Register, 2006).

When new possibilities for communication and commerce first emerged with the birth of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s, there was much talk of 'the end of cities'. It was believed by a number of prominent futurists that the Web was going to be the breakthrough that could overcome the need for cities once and for all (see, for example, Mitchell, 2000). But again, such thinking works on the assumption that cities themselves are a means rather than an end, that they are a necessary evil that people will abandon when they have better alternatives. But in fact urbanization is continuing throughout the world at an unprecedented rate, and recent sociological research suggests that the choice of city remains one of the decisions that Americans deem the most important in their lives (see Florida, 2008). Cities are good as means to ends, but Jacobs has never been more relevant in her insistence that the greatest value of a city is its intrinsic value, its value as an end in itself.

Ethics in Making a Living

Turning now to the explicit moral theory of *Systems of Survival*, we find Jacobs making a different (and much more general) kind of connection to the Aristotelian tradition, for she puts at the heart of the theory the ways in which character is shaped by patterns of human cooperation—the system of virtues and vices that make human persons and organizations morally good or bad. But she also disagrees at a fundamental level with the Aristotelian tradition, for she interprets Aristotle as advocating a single system of norms and values, whereas her own view is that we must distinguish between two systems: one pertaining to the sphere of ruling (the 'guardian syndrome') and one pertaining to the exchange of goods and services (the 'commercial syndrome'). Each of these two systems of cooperation establishes sets of means and ends; each requires the cultivation of tightly interconnected virtues and values; each develops, over the course of generations, the complexes of custom and ritual that determine the character of a culture. Jacobs undertakes the descriptive task of identifying, distinguishing, and relating the elements of the two syndromes in order to pursue the normative task of showing how the two can get out of balance with one another, and, most importantly, how a failure to keep them distinct can lead to a corruption of both.

The qualities that Jacobs associates with each of the syndromes are stated, in their briefest form, as imperatives. Those that form the 'commercial', or 'trading', syndrome are easily recognizable as virtues of the business world: 'shun force, come to voluntary agreements, be honest, compete, respect contracts, use initiative and enterprise, be efficient, promote comfort and convenience, dissent for the sake of the task, be thrifty' (Jacobs, 1992, p. 215). The whole system of production and trade depends upon the ability to rely upon the honesty of strangers, to be able to enter into agreements with them and to know that the resulting contracts will be binding. Within this framework of honesty and reliable agreements, the system encourages competition for the sake of better production and distribution, such that acts of initiative, invention, and internal dissent become valuable as means of revealing better ways of doing things, while thriftiness and efficient organization help the enterprise to achieve more with fewer resources. The competition in commercial life stops short of the coercive force that would undermine the spirit of voluntary

agreements that forms its foundation. It promotes comfort and convenience in an effort to counteract the combative mentality that results from material deprivation and ideological fervour (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 33–42).

The guardian system, by contrast, has everything to do with force, for its values derive from the task of asserting and maintaining political power. Its imperatives include these prescriptions: ‘shun trading, exert prowess, be obedient and disciplined, respect hierarchy, be loyal, deceive for the sake of the task, make rich use of leisure, dispense largesse, be exclusive’ (Jacobs, 1992, p. 215). Where trade requires people who can enter easily into financial relationships but remain open to changing market opportunities, governance requires people who will not be swayed from their obligations and loyalties by the enticements of financial gain. Where trade must make the most of limited time and resources, governance is strengthened by manifesting its importance through grand ceremonies, lavish expressions of largesse, and great shows of force. Where trade expands its range of potential partners by rewarding consistent honesty and openness to the good will of strangers (even encouraging dissent for the sake of making the venture more competitive), governing closes its ranks around those who excel, not only in performance, but in forms of obedience and loyalty that entail a willingness to deceive when deception will serve the objectives of the ruling authority (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 57–79).

In the history of cultures the guardian syndrome can easily be recognized in the virtues of warriors, hunters, and raiders. But Jacobs means to recognize also the ways in which such virtues must be adapted to the problem of just governance under conditions of complex specializations of work, and this recognition is signalled in her decision to name the syndrome after the governing class of the imaginary state in Plato’s *Republic*. The reason why Plato’s guardians do not engage in trade, or why later codes of chivalry forbade it, or why today the exchange of political services for money by elected officials is considered a form of corruption, is not that these things violate some particular rule or single value, but that they disrupt an entire system of delicately interrelated guardian values (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 31–32, 59, 153, 179–189).

The two sets of imperatives constitute ‘syndromes’ because each item in each set is interconnected with the others, and all derive their meaning from the larger purposes to which they are dedicated. Any of the virtues, when taken out of context, becomes either ambiguous (e.g. ‘be loyal’) or prima facie wrong (e.g. ‘deceive’). This context-dependent nature of the virtues makes sense of what would otherwise seem contradictory—for example, that in some cases we condone withholding information, or the taking of property, or physical harm, while in other contexts we regard these as dishonest and abusive. The context dependency, however, does not mean that excesses cannot occur—as in excessive force, obsessive efficiency, or paranoiac degrees of secrecy. Such phenomena, in fact, constitute a first type of moral failure that can occur within either of the syndromes.

A second type would be a deficiency of imbalance. The commercial system and the guardian system are both essential to a healthy society. Thus one should criticize a state where commercial virtues cannot take hold just as much as a state where governments are too weak to be effective. For all of the energy that members of the public and private spheres spend criticizing the interests of the other sphere, the underlying truth is that the overarching goal of society must be to seek the most productive synergy of the two.

A third type of aberration, and the one that is so pervasive yet misunderstood as to demand the bulk of Jacobs' attention, is the 'monstrous hybrid', wherein the virtues of one syndrome are imported into the other in a way that potentially undermines the working of the whole syndrome (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 80–81). The bribery of public officials forms a fairly obvious example of the way commercial functions imported into the guardian system become corruptive. Jacobs gives a more subtle example in the case of transit managers who decided to reward traffic police for high numbers of citations and arrests the way one might structure rewards for a sales team—a practice that ended up encouraging many more errors and false arrests (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 147–148, 152). The opposite sort of incursion—of guardian values into the commercial system—finds an obvious example in the case of extortion, where business owners become obligated to payments under the threat of physical force. In its proper context we might call this 'taxation', but as exercised by organized crime it puts illegitimate power rather than voluntary agreements at the heart of the commercial arrangement, thus corrupting it (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 89, 93–97). A much broader example is to be found in command economies. Although their political authority, in any given case, may very well be legitimate, command economies can negate so many of the rewards for initiative, competition, efficiency, and thrift that they undercut the self-motivating and self-rewarding character of production and exchange. The black market that emerges in such situations is an equally, though differently, demoralized hybrid wherein neither the guardian nor the commercial virtues function as they should (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 98–102).

The Syndromes in the City

One who expects to find, in *Systems of Survival*, an extended application of this moral theory to urban affairs will be disappointed. Although Jacobs never ceased to be thoroughly caught up in urban issues, this book seems to be working hard to be something of much more general scope than a book on cities. And while this shift of focus is understandable, still, it is in some ways unfortunate, for the new theory can be especially useful in expanding the implicit ethics of the urban works and making sense of the circumstances in which they were conceived. In fact, so helpful is *Systems* in illuminating the case of Robert Moses that one is tempted to posit that case as Jacobs' chief motivation in developing the theory. But because an argument for this claim would have to rely heavily on circumstantial evidence, I will limit myself to showing how three key questions arising out of the 1950's New York battles can be answered by bringing Jacobs' moral theory to bear. Whether Jacobs meant them to do so expressly or not I will leave to others to decide.

A first lingering question, then, arising out of the detailed account in Caro's *Power Broker* is the question as to why the political establishment and the media tolerated, for so many years, practices which, when they were ultimately made public, were scandalous enough to bring Moses down. Surely there were people who knew far earlier than the late 1950s, and in great detail, exactly how Moses operated. But not only did they not expose him (which could be accounted for by fear of reprisal), they supported him fervently, and in strong, morally weighted rhetoric. One can perhaps explain this support simply by saying that the flaws of the means were justified, in their minds, by the good of the ends. But Jacobs gives us the tools for producing a

more complex and powerful kind of explanation. Anyone who came into contact with Moses had the experience of a moral authority of rare intensity. Everything he did demanded more of people: they had to serve more of the public, solve problems faster, work longer hours, and be satisfied, for their reward (as he said), with 'an occasional rain-washed bone' (Moses, 1956, p. 13). Yet this moral authority was thoroughly and exclusively pledged to the guardian syndrome. Hence it was a moral order in which loyalty and obedience are paramount, deception is routine, and retaliation is accepted practice. One is much less likely to question such practices if they do not merely serve a lofty end but also fit coherently into a complex interlocking system of normative behaviours.

A second question one might ask is, how could both sides, in the battles over New York City neighbourhood visions, claim the moral high ground in the fight while recognizing nothing of moral value in the claims of their opponents? How could the adversaries be speaking the same moral language and yet be talking right past one another? The answer lies in the fact that the people in the neighbourhoods were, for the most part, habituated in the commercial syndrome of values, and were prone to interpret everything through that lens, while the city leaders were just as thoroughly formed by the guardian syndrome. Jacobs describes how she herself was so wedded to the commercial way of seeing things that it took her a long time to be able to appreciate the necessity of ruling and the legitimacy, at least in many contexts, of guardian values. Moreover, she had to acknowledge that if these neighbours were to fight city hall they had to organize their political opposition according to their own version of the guardian syndrome (Lawrence, 1989, p. 274). Moses, while he certainly had great praise for the benefits of commerce, and while he was a Republican and a vocal critic of communism and socialism, had a surprising inability to see how commercial activity was thoroughly integrated into the life of the New York neighbourhoods that he was tearing down and replacing with purely residential housing projects. In such cases, the guardian syndrome can blind one to the vigorous commercial activity that is happening right before one's eyes.

A third question has to do with how we are to judge, from our contemporary perspective, the moral failures of the urban renewal movement. The theory of the two syndromes could be used to characterize the Moses approach as an example of the guardian syndrome par excellence, or perhaps better, the guardian syndrome taken to extremes. But most likely, were Jacobs to apply her theory to this case, she would consider it a paradigmatic case of the monstrous hybrid. In part this hybrid character derives from the scale of Moses' projects—the way they overwhelmed market-driven building with government-mandated building, creating so many works, and of such size, as to require huge segments of the construction industry to be turned over to public works. The result was that Moses, the epitome of the guardian, wielded extraordinary power over commercial investment, the building industry, and labour markets. Caro's assessment of the Moses legacy fits well with such an interpretation, for Caro saw the economic decline of New York City in the 1970s as attributable, in large measure, to the way Moses shifted the city's priorities to a certain kind of physical infrastructure without understanding, or even trying very hard to understand, the priorities that were thereby neglected and the ways in which his vision for the future actually worked against the economic health of the city.

But the hybrid that Jacobs would emphasize most in the case of New York and other great North American cities is not the work of particular leaders or planners, but the abstractive planning mentality itself. The planning mentality, which is Jacobs' principal adversary (at least in its overweening forms) on nearly every page of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, subverts spontaneous enterprise in cities by conceiving its solutions on the drawing table and then imposing them through the devices of government. It thwarts the social ingenuity of residents, and thereby their agency and creativity, by imagining their problems in the abstract and then solving them in uniform, comprehensive ways. It masks important kinds of feedback to its initiatives by answering more or less exclusively to its own measures of success. In undertaking its projects, the planning mentality always believes that it is promoting (among other things) business, but it cannot grasp that what urban commerce needs most is a set of relations that planning cannot provide because these relations are, in many respects, just the opposite of planning. Planning hybridizes commerce in a way that subverts the very thing it wants to promote: the commercial and residential creativity, enterprise, and spontaneous community of urban neighbourhoods.

In answering these three questions so clearly and coherently, Jacobs' moral theory can be seen to have an integral place in the arc of Jacobs' intellectual career. What her explicit ethical writings add to her earlier polemics against the excesses of modern planning is a grasp of the deep roots of planning's failures in the more general characteristics of commonsense morality and character formation. In so doing, she adds an important measure of complexity and depth to the famous insights of her great trilogy of urban writings and she reveals more openly to us the ethical concerns that were always present in those writings.

In our day, when, as I have suggested, the urgency of urban problems is taking on an increasingly moral character, it is of great value to have available a broad ethical perspective, which, for all of its general scope, is yet born of some of the most specific and historically important events in the history of American cities. In her ethics Jacobs once again proves herself unique, even idiosyncratic, in her approach, but widely useful to those who are willing to try seeing the life of the human community in the light of her distinctive insights.

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