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Architecture and Philosophy

ABSTRACT: What might be meant by the phrase "architecture and philosophy"? I distinguish what it might mean from three other possibilities, "philosophy of architecture," "philosophy as architecture," and "architecture as philosophy." The first refers to a subfield of academic aesthetics, itself a subfield of academic philosophy; the second to the use of architectural metaphors in philosophical writing; the third to the idea that works of architecture should express abstract, philosophical ideas. I discuss the pitfalls in the last of these. Instead, I argue, going back to Vitruvius, that the phrase "architecture and philosophy" should be taken to connote the architect's obligation to satisfy through her building (*firmitas*) the program for her work, thus the client's and users' needs (*utilitas*) as well as aesthetic considerations (*venustas*), but beyond that to be sensitive to all ethical issues broached by her work and to have an understanding of the way or ways of life in which her work and its use will become involved."

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Philosophy *of* Architecture and Architecture *as* Philosophy

The editors have asked me to write on the topic "Architecture and Philosophy." What kind of question is that? Don't we all know perfectly well what all three terms, "architecture," "philosophy," and "and," mean? Or even if there is some room for debate about precisely what the extensions of "architecture" and "philosophy" are, certainly we all know what "and" means, indeed would we not be unable to think, speak, read, or write if we did not know what "and" (or its equivalent in other languages) means? Don't we know that when it conjoins two propositions, both must be true for the conjunction to be true, if it links two terms for objects, both must exist, if it links two terms for properties, both must be instantiated, and so on? In that case, shouldn't I focus on the meaning of "architecture" and "philosophy," thus trying to make those two common but perhaps vague terms more precise and thereby make clearer what could be meant by conjoining them? Well, "architecture" and "philosophy" are both big words, so let me start with the little word "and." Then I will turn to the word "philosophy." But perhaps to the disappointment of readers of this piece, I will not say anything much about the definition of "architecture."

But I will take "and" in context, thus I begin by distinguishing the phrase "philosophy and architecture" from three that might seem similar, namely "philosophy of architecture," "architecture as philosophy," and "philosophy as architecture." "Philosophy of architecture" suggests something conventional, a subfield of philosophical aesthetics in which various kinds of questions common in general aesthetics are applied to the special case of architecture. These would include ontological questions like "What is the work of architecture," a design, a plan, a built structure? Or is architecture, to use Nelson Goodman's contrast, an "autographic" or an "allographic" art[1]: is only one structure built from a design, by the architect's own hand (only so to speak, of course, given how many people are involved in actually building a structure) the original, and all others only copies, or can there be equally authentic multiples from one plan (as in a housing development) which are all still genuine works of architecture? Or questions of definition, like "Is architecture a fine art or a visual art, like painting and sculpture?" or does the fact that most buildings must answer to a client's program, defined by the

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[1] N. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1968.

client's self-conceived needs and goals, answer to various sorts of legal constraints such as zoning regulations and building codes, and be built with all sorts of technical assistance from engineers of various kinds, materials specialists, lighting specialists, and so on, mean that architecture cannot be properly counted as an art at all? Should architects be considered artists, or something else? And then there are questions about values and evaluation: Should satisfaction of the program, of legal and financial constraints, of technical constraints, etc., be necessary conditions for any judgment of architectural value, with aesthetic considerations coming in only later, or are practical and aesthetic concerns to be related in some other way? Should architects be considered artists, aesthetically refined engineers, or something else? No doubt some philosophers interested in architecture might be interested in all of these questions, and more; some interested only in some or one; some perhaps interested in something else entirely. But none of these will be my concern here.

So what about "architecture as philosophy" or "philosophy as architecture"? The latter of these will not be my topic either. By "philosophy as architecture" I have in mind the use of architectural language and imagery within philosophy or other disciplines, such as mathematics, as when, to justify his project of re-establishing all of philosophy from some single, indubitable premise, Descartes writes "that buildings undertaken and completed by a single architect are usually more attractive and better planned than those which several have tried to patch up by adapting old walls built for different purposes. Again, ancient cities which have gradually grown from mere villages are usually ill-proportioned, compared with those orderly towns which planners lay out as they fancy on level ground."[2] This is what the 2022 winner of the Berggruen Prize, Kojin Karatani, has called "architecture as metaphor."[3] I am not going to pursue this topic because even if such metaphors might tell us something useful about the disciplines to or in which they are applied, such as philosophy, mathematics, economics, and so on, they usually do not tell us very much about architecture itself but rather presuppose something about architecture. A metaphor is supposed to take us from something more obvious to something less obvious, and you do not have to know more about buildings and cities than an average child does to get

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[2] R. Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 116

[3] K. Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1995.

Descartes's point, or the point of his contrast between shaky and secure "foundations" for the "edifice" of knowledge.[4]

What about the reverse, "architecture as philosophy"? This needs discussion. What I have in mind here is the use of a building or other built structure (a monument, a plaza, etc.; here is where some discussion of the definition of "architecture" might be needed) to express an abstract idea or assert a proposition that might be thought to be philosophical, and is not itself about building, the nature of buildings, or anything obviously architectural. That is, such buildings would be referential but not self-referential. Examples of this, all mercifully unbuilt, might be designs like Étienne-Louis Boulée's design for a Cenotaph for Newton[5], Claude-Nicholas Ledoux's houses for charcoal burners and lumbermen in the shapes of their ovens and logs[6], Jean-Nicholas Sobre's "Temple of Immortality,"[7] Antoine Laurent Thomas Vaudoyer's "House of a Cosmopolite,"[8] or a more recent project like Steven Holl's early (1980–1984) project for "Autonomous Artisans' Housing," in which, in the words of Robert McCarter, "each house articulates the character of the occupant's occupation by employing their craft material in its realization."[9] There are several problems with such projects. For one, like program music, where you typically cannot tell what the music is supposed to be about without the discursive program in front of you (a different problem from not being able to hear the words in an opera or oratorio without the libretto or text in front of you), you might not be able to tell what idea such a work is supposed to express without some sort of external aid, a discursive explanation in print, from a guide, or perhaps inscribed on the building itself. Or, just as the Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick argued, while music might be able to suggest *emotions* by properly musical features such as tempo, rhythm, keys, etc., it cannot articulate or express *abstract ideas* by strictly musical means[10] – it is not a *language* with semantic content. Talk of architectural "language" is just as metaphorical as is talk of musical

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[4] R. Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, p. 115.
[5] E. Kaufmann, *Three Revolutionary Architects: Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu*, The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1952, p. 462; K. Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, pp. 306–309; B. Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750-1890*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 86–88.
[6] E. Kaufmann, *Three Revolutionary Architects,* pp. 527, 532.
[7] E. Kaufmann, *Architecture in the Age of Reason: Baroque and Post-Baroque in England, Italy, France*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1955, figure 191.
[8] *Ibid*., figure 192.
[9] R. McCarter, *Steven Holl*, Phaidon, London, 2015, p. 29.
[10] E. Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, Novello, London, 1891.

"language." Another problem is that such a structure might be felt to be constraining or even pigeon-holing for the proposed user: would the artisans envisioned by Holl really want to take their work home with them, or never to be able to escape the identity conferred by their work? Perhaps the cobbler or tinsmith might like his house to announce his trade to every passer-by, but perhaps he would rather be identified by something else, like his hobby, his faith, or his spouse's preferences, perhaps he would like his house to be compatible with various interests he might develop or identities he might adopt during his tenancy, or perhaps he would just like to live in happy anonymity. Even philosophers might not like to live in houses shaped like books and covered with leather-look sheathing (although when my wife was looking with her mother for an urn for her father's ashes, she saw one in the shape of a bronze book, which she thought might be nice, when the time came, for my ashes to be placed next to my actual books. I wouldn't have objected had she bought it then, and won't be able to object if she buys it when the time does come).

As I noted, these examples of philosophical, semantic but not self-referential architecture, have all gone unbuilt, and perhaps were never even imagined as being really built, because no client would want to pay for or occupy such structures. But now let's consider what we might think of as more self-referential architecture aimed at expressing abstract ideas, that is, ideas about architecture itself. Here we can consider some structures that have actually been built, for example, some of the early house designs by Peter Eisenman. (Some of Eisenman's residential designs during this period, say 1968-1978, were built, some not.) As Rafael Moneo has described Eisenman's approach at this time, his

> obsession was to free architecture of all shackles and allow it to unfold without contaminations, whether of place, function, or building systems. The goal was architecture at its purest: an architecture that, by adopting the new and unfortunately already forgotten formal principles of modernity, aspired to the same thing as physicists did when discovering the world through new (and not forgotten) formulas from the theory of relativity, or as those involved in knowledge of the human psyche did through the use of new (and not forgotten) psychoanalytic techniques[11] –

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[11] R. Moneo, *Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004, pp. 147–148.

or, we might add, as formalist mathematicians, logicians, and philosophers did. Or, as Moneo quotes Mario Gandelsonas as writing,

> Eisenman has introduced an important idea from generative, or transformational grammar, in which language is seen as a generative activity rather than as a description of semantic and syntactic relationships. In this view of language, syntactics takes on a new meaning, where syntactic structure itself is seen as the primary generator of language.[12]

I understand this to mean that in Eisenman's view at that time, architecture was not to concern itself with anything external to pure form, neither the intended function nor use of the building nor any reference form might have to anything other than itself, but was simply to create formal relationships among the most basic elements of architecture, planes as in walls, floors and ceilings (what they are made of being, pardon the pun, largely immaterial), the spaces they might enclose or that might enclose them, and other tectonic features such as columns, staircases seen as triangles or the hypotenuses of triangles with a serrated edge, and so on. Eisenman designed houses by rotating conjoined solids, surrounding the core of houses with frames of post and beams that might suggest *brises soleil* but would not actually provide any shade (e.g. House III, 1971[13]), constructing staircases without railings, which would endanger any small child or older adult, and so on. The point is that such designs – plug in your favorite examples – are intended above all to express some abstract idea, but an abstract and reductive idea of architecture itself reduced to its formal components. The houses do have walls and roofs that can keep out the elements, to be sure, but any other concession to the uses and the comfort of occupants seems quite secondary to the exercise in formalism, as if the house were a mathematical or logical construction, or a piece of philosophy. Indeed, as Moneo further reports, when "Massimo Vignelli [...] set about to 'decorate' House VI with furniture and flowers for publication in *House & Garden*, Eisenman took offense. As far as he was concerned, the house had been defiled. Indeed, House VI lost some of its value and interest as soon as it took on the dynamics of

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[12]   *Ibid*., p. 152, quoting M. Gandelsonas, "On Reading Architecture: Peter Eisenman, the Syntactic Dimension," *Progressive Architecture*, March, 1972, p. 82.
[13]   R. Moneo, *Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects*, p. 161

everyday life."[14] This anecdote might remind one of Adolf Loos's satirical "Story of the Poor Little Rich Man" (1900), who is barked at by his architect for displaying some of the birthday presents he has just received in his newly renovated house. "What do you think you are doing, getting presents given you? Have I not designed everything for you? Have I not thought of everything? You don't need anything else. You are complete." Upon being so spoken to, the poor little rich man sheepishly put his new things away, instead of kicking the architect out of his house.[15] To be sure, the architect that Loos was imagining in 1900 was no doubt imagined to have designed and decorated in an ornate *K. und K.* or *fin de siécle* style, precisely what Loos would break from in his own work of the following decades, which one might even think of as the beginning of the path that led to Eisenman. But I would venture to say that in the hands of Loos the geometrical simplicity of his designs always remained in the service of the use, comfort, and pleasure of the client, while I would not say that about these early designs of Eisenman. Loos did not treat architecture *as* philosophy, that is, as the expression of an abstract idea *rather* than a building meant for use, comfort, and pleasure, which *might* express or exemplify some abstract idea along with serving those ends. But these designs of Eisenman illustrate the risk of doing so.

Another contrast to these built and unbuilt early designs of Peter Eisenman might be the "Case Study" houses published in *Art & Architecture* from 1945-1966 under its editor John Entenza.[16] These designs, again some built and some unbuilt, were commissioned by Entenza and designed by a variety of mid-century modernist, mostly California architects, some still well-known and others now less known, including Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Neutra, William Wurster, Raphael Soriano, Craig Ellwood, and others. These designs certainly *had* or *exemplified* a philosophy in one sense of that word: they were meant to be buildable by people of middle-class means, not the very rich; they used lots of glass, sliding doors, and so on, to be open to the pleasant California climate; like many modernist residential designs from Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie houses on they combined free-flowing public living and

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 165.
[15] A. Loos, "Story of the Poor Little Rich Man", *On Architecture*, Ariadne Press, Riverside, CA, 2002, p. 51.
[16] See E. A. T. Smith, *Case Study Houses: The Complete CSH Program 1945-1966*, Taschen, Cologne, 2002, with the fabulous photographs of Julius Shulman.

dining spaces with modest bedrooms and baths; they were to be easily maintained without the servants who could no longer be found in post-WW II America; and so on. But they did not try to *express* or *refer* to any abstract ideas; one might say they expressed a certain philosophy *of* architecture but were certainly not architecture *as* philosophy. And they had an extensive, I would say beneficial influence on American residential architecture in many parts of the country, at least until the rise of the psuedo-neo-Colonial or neo-Georgian McMansions, with a Palladian window no matter what, that have blanketed the American landscape since the decline of Wrightian and modernist paradigms (although always, without regard to their exterior style, with the "open floor plan" pioneered by Wright).

But now it will be noted that I have just used the word "philosophy" and the phrase "philosophy of architecture" in a different sense than that I defined at the beginning of this essay. I will comment on that ambiguity in the course of now considering what might be a valuable conjunction of architecture and philosophy in contrast to those I have just rejected.

Philosophy *and* Architecture

Architecture has always involved an "and." Vitruvius defined the aims of architecture by means of a conjunction of three terms, *firmitas, utilitas*, and *venustas*, rendered in several recent translations as "soundness, utility, and attractiveness"[17] or "durabililty, utility, and beauty."[18] I like to render Vitruvius's Latin terms loosely as "good construction, functionality, and aesthetic appeal" to make clear that both the intended uses of works of architecture and the sources of its aesthetic appeal must be understood broadly rather than narrowly.[19] I also think that the category of good construction should be understood less as an independent third goal of architecture rather than as whatever is necessary to maintain the functionality of an architectural work on the one hand and its aesthetic appeal on the other, given the relevant conception of each of these – after all, what will count as appropriate constructional methods and technology to secure

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[17] Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 26.
[18] Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Penguin, London, 2009, p. 19; on the transmission of the ancient text to the Renaissance and beyond, see the fascinating book A. Tavares, *Vitruvius without Text: The Biography of a Book*, gta Verlag, Zürich, 2022.
[19] P. Guyer, *A Philosopher Looks at Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021, pp. 15–34.

the functionality, including the safety, of an exposition pavilion intended to last for several months, a business property expected to be profitable for forty years, and a temple or courthouse intended to last for centuries will differ greatly, and likewise what materials it will take to maintain the aesthetic appeal of such different structures will also differ greatly.[20] Immanuel Kant also thought of works of architecture as answering two demands, that of functionality on the one hand and aesthetic appeal on the other, when he used categories of architectural works as his examples of his category of "adherent beauty" (*anhängende Schönheit*, *pulcritudo adhaerens*): adherent beauty is "conditioned beauty" that is "ascribed to objects that stand under the concept of a particular end," which in the case of an artifact, such as a work of architecture, is its intended use(s) or function(s). Kant's most straightforward illustration of this definition is precisely the adherent beauty "of a building (such as a church, a palace, an arsenal, or a garden-house), [which] presuppose[s] a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection."[21] Kant is not very explicit about exactly how the concept of its end "conditions" the beauty of an object with adherent beauty, but at the very least he seems to mean that the object's suitability to its intended purpose is a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* condition of our finding it beautiful: an object's unsuitability to its intended purpose may be enough to prevent us from taking any or perhaps much pleasure in its appearance and our experience of it, but its satisfaction of its purpose alone is not typically enough to make us find it beautiful – for that it also has to trigger the "free play" of imagination and understanding that is the basis of any beauty according to Kant.[22] Kant also does not explain what the basis of this conception of adherent beauty as "conditioned" by the (perceived, of course) functionality of its object is. Perhaps it is just a basic fact about human psychology that we are incapable of taking pleasure in that which we judge to be contrapurposive even though we might otherwise be capable of experiencing pleasure in aspects of objects other than their suitability for ordinary purposes, such as housing various human

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20 For a contrary view of the significance of the category of *firmitas*, see S. Koller, *The Birth of Ethics from the Spirit of Tectonics*, Dissertation, Technical University Delft, 2015.
21 I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, §16, 5:229–230. (Pagination in this edition reproduced from *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, Georg Reimer, Berlin, 1913.)
22 *Ibid.*, Introduction, section VII, 5:189–190; §9, 5:5:217–229; §21, 5:238–239; §35, 5:287.

activities, as Kant's conception of our experience of beauty as "without interest" supposes. If Kant has any sort of non-empirical argument for the conditioning role of functionality in cases of adherent beauty, he has not shared it with us.

Be the details what they may, Kant's conception of architecture as a case of adherent beauty clearly means that our experience and judgment of architecture must in some way *conjoin* our experience of its functionality and our experience of its aesthetic appeal – in other words, Vitruvius's *utilitas* and *venustas*. Now to come back to Vitruvius, whether we should think of his triplex of *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas* as a conjunction of two fundamental terms and a supporting player or of three equally fundamental terms, either way it is clear that architecture typically has to answer to *at least* two demands: functionality on the one hand, that is, suitability to some intended use or uses, and aesthetic appeal on the other hand, some form of satisfaction in the appearance and the use of the building that goes beyond its use and is, at least sometimes, available to those who may only experience the building without actually entering and using it, whether that appeal is achieved through the construction and materials of the building itself (the "poetics of construction," in Kenneth Frampton's phrase[23]), as many twentieth-century ideologies of architecture have insisted, or by ornament, as John Ruskin asserted.[24] (Some have interpreted Louis Sullivan's famous dictum that "form follows function" to mean that the function of a building should fully determine its appearance and the basis of its aesthetic appeal, but given that Sullivan's glorious ornamentation is hardly dictated by the function of an office tower, a department store, or a small-town bank, that could hardly be what *he* meant; he could only have meant that the function of a building is a necessary condition of its success, so that its ornamentation cannot conflict with its function.)

But while this might explain the conjunction of utility and beauty in the aims of architecture, this conjunction is not equivalent to the conjunction of architecture and philosophy. But neither will these two conjunctions turn out to be unrelated. To see why not, let us return now to the ambiguity in the term "philosophy" that I noted at the end of the previous section. (As already suggested, I will just pretend that the term

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[23] K. Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture*: *The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1995.
[24] J. Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, George Allen, Orpington, UK, 1880.

"architecture" is well-defined, even though of course it is not, and like any empirical concept has both paradigmatic and borderline instances or applications, like landscape architecture, naval architecture, monumental and funerary design, perhaps branded service station design, and so on.) On the one hand, the word "philosophy" (and its cognates at least in other Indo-European languages) can mean a specialized academic subject and professional practice, the subject and practice that we can think of as having begun with Plato and Aristotle, having continued through the Hellenistic and Neo-Platonic periods in the Greco-Roman world, having been taken up in Arabic, Moorish, and Persian circles while Europe suffered through its "Dark Ages," having re-emerged in Europe during the Renaissance and the "scientific revolution" of the seventeenth century, having then divided into "rationalist" and "empiricist" or "continental" and "anglophone" branches, and so on – this is hardly the place for a complete narrative of the history of philosophy – until it became a well-recognized academic subject studied primarily at the college and university level (although now threatened by the overwhelmingly vocational concerns of so many students and their families and of the higher-education industry serving them). Since antiquity, this academic subject has been divided into the three main branches, in John Locke's terminology, for example, of "physics, ethics, and logic," or the study of the fundamental concepts and principles of "The Nature of Things, as they are in themselves, their Relations, and their Manner of Operations," of "That which Man ought to do, as a rational and voluntary Agent, for the Attainment of any End, especially Happiness," and of "The ways and means, whereby the knowledge of both the one and the other of these, are attained and communicated"[25] – although of course other names and descriptions of the parts of philosophy in this sense are available. On the other hand, the word "philosophy" in everyday usage means something like the attitudes and approaches of ordinary, reflective but not academic or specialist, people to various sorts of matters, perhaps especially practices, perhaps especially important matters and practices such as their professions but above all their conceptions of how they ought to live their lives, or their principles for so doing, without necessarily implying that they have or seek any rigorous justification for their approaches or principles in the way that professional philosophers would want. In this

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[25] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, Book IV, Chapter XXI, §1, p. 720.

sense, "philosophy" may be used in the plural, "philosophies," and may be founded in some form of prudence or faith rather than the rational analysis and argumentation of academic philosophy.

Virtuvius's own conception of philosophy, in his opening chapter on "The Education of the Architect," comprehends both of these definitions. On the one hand, after having specified that the architect must be literate in letters and geometry, that he must have studied draftsmanship and history, and so on, he says that the architect must also have a philosophy in the sense of a conception of how human life should be lived:

> Philosophy completes the architect's character by instilling loftiness of spirit, so that he will not be arrogant, but rather tolerant, fair, and trustworthy, and, most important of all, free from greed. For there is no work that can be truly done without honesty and disinterestedness; let him not be too grasping, nor fix his mind on receiving gifts or rewards, but let him pay serious attention to protecting his dignity by maintaining a good reputation – for these are the things that philosophy recommends.[26]

In other words, the architect should be "philosophical" about life, and he need not study Plato and Aristotle, Stoics or Epicureans, to satisfy that requirement. On the other hand, Vitruvius also uses "philosophy" to connote specialized knowledge that he thinks the architect needs, thus "philosophy serves to explain the science which in Greek is called *physiology*," or what we might call physics or knowledge of the "facts of nature" – to properly design an aqueduct, the architect must know which way water flows! – as well as music, which provides a grasp of "*canonical* and *mathematical* relations," "the science of medicine," which includes knowledge of healthful "climates" and "airs," and so on.[27] Here Vitruvius is using "philosophy" in the broad sense that lingered into modernity in the phrase "natural philosophy" as the name for what we now call natural science and is not confined to the present-day academic subject of philosophy, which may concern itself with the *foundations* of mathematics or natural science, for instance, their fundamental concepts and principles, but which does not comprise or include those subjects themselves. It would be anachronistic to think that Vitruvius used "philosophy" in

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[26] Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, p. 22.
[27] *Ibid*., pp. 22–23.

its contemporary academic sense, thus that he drew any rigid distinction between what we would think of as various sciences themselves and the analytical study of the concepts and principles or premises of such sciences. By "philosophy" in his second usage of it he meant something like all rigorous knowledge. But this remains distinct from his first usage of "philosophy," where it connotes something like a philosophical attitude toward the conduct of human life. In his view philosophy in both of its senses is necessary for the successful practice of architecture.

Vitruvius does not elaborate on the necessity of philosophy in the first sense; that should be self-evident, and necessary for any kind of successful commerce with other human beings. Why philosophy in his second sense is necessary for the successful architect becomes clear over the course of his ten books: the architect is not simply making beautiful forms, but designing houses, temples, markets, fortifications, and so on, that need to be properly sited for their function, made of proper materials, suited to the climate and weather of their locations, properly situated with respect to the sun and its changing position during the year, and so on. And without a raft of technical specialists to assist him, structural engineers, HVAC specialists, acoustic engineers, and so on, the architect himself has to know everything relevant to the *utilitas* and *firmitas* of what he will build as well as to its *venustas* or aesthetic appeal. But one thing that Vitruvius certainly does not say is that the architect has to know all this philosophy in order to *express* it, to *express* abstract ideas, through his buildings. He is not completely immune to the potential semantic content of *some* buildings or elements of buildings: for example, he explains that the Athenians used Caryatids in the Erechtheion of the Acropolis, which (supposedly) represent the captured matrons of the vanquished city of Caryae, to send a message about the fate of any other city that might think of siding with the Persians.[28] But he hardly suggests that *all* buildings should express messages or ideas, let alone the abstract ideas of philosophy as a discipline. He certainly does not suppose that buildings should or could express the abstract ideas of Platonic or Stoic philosophy, nor does he suggest that built structures should express what we would consider scientific ideas. The architect who would design a successful aqueduct has to know that gravity causes water to flow downhill rather than uphill, but his design for an aqueduct does not express or refer to that idea, principle, or law of nature.

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Kant might seem to come closer to the view that works of architecture should actually express abstract, philosophical ideas. He holds that the "spirit" of artistic "genius," that is, the *sine qua non* of successful beautiful or fine (*schöne*) art is the expression of "aesthetic ideas," which is in turn analyzed as the *aesthetic* expression – the expression through indeterminate but beautiful products of the imagination – of *ideas of reason*, "approximations" in artistic media of "concepts of reason (intellectual ideas)" to which no ordinary experience is "fully adequate," that is, which cannot be directly and completely exemplified in ordinary experience. Kant has in mind above all moral ideas, such as those of "the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, [...] death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc."[29] Kant does not exempt any medium of art from this claim, indeed in spite of having earlier claimed that the "free" beauties of nature "do not represent anything, no object under a determinate concept,"[30] he now goes on to say that *all* beauty, "(whether it be beauty of nature, or of art), can in general be called the *expression* of aesthetic ideas."[31] Once again, he does not pause to explain this apparent reversal of position, but presumably he thinks it is permissible because aesthetic ideas are not determinate but indeterminate, and plausible that once we have become accustomed to the expression of abstract ideas in art we also come to read the expression of such ideas back into our experience of nature. But when it comes to the special case of architecture, Kant does not in fact say that works of architecture must express general moral ideas. Rather, he says that architecture is the "art of presenting," with this intention but yet in an aesthetically purposive way, "concepts of things that are possible *only through art*, and whose form has as its determining ground not nature but a voluntary end. In the latter a certain *use* of the artistic object is the main thing, to which, as a condition, the aesthetic ideas are restricted."[32] The first part of this obscure statement is part of Kant's contrast between architecture and sculpture: the latter creates images of natural objects, such as human or animal bodies; architecture does not, but creates its own forms without imitating other forms in nature. The second sentence alludes back to Kant's conception of the intended function or use of a work of architecture as a necessary and limiting condition on its aesthetic aspects, including now the expression of

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[29] I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §49, 5:314.
[30] *Ibid*., §16, 5:229.
[31] *Ibid*., §51, 5:320.
[32] *Ibid*., §51, 5:322.

aesthetic ideas, or aesthetic expression of ideas. The second part of the first sentence is obscure, but might be taken to suggest that the form of an architectural work, broadly speaking its aesthetic aspect, should express its intended use, what kind of structure it is meant to be, rather than en external idea such as that of heaven or hell, virtue or vice. That is, a house should look like a house, a temple like a temple, or maybe a house should express domesticity, a temple divinity (whatever these would look like). In any case, Kant seems to be shying away from any suggestion that works of architecture should express any other sort of abstract ideas, or that architecture should be philosophical in that sense.

So neither Vitruvius nor Kant commit themselves to the view that architecture and philosophy should be conjoined in the sense of architecture attempting to express abstract, philosophical ideas.[33] Perhaps we can find some cases in the history of architecture where works do successfully express abstract ideas, at least to those who experience them with appropriate background knowledge – which is required to interpret almost any sort of expression, and should not be thought of as undermining the claim to successful expression. For example, the high, dimly lit ceilings and towering spires of Gothic cathedrals have long been interpreted to express the immensity of God exceeding human understanding.[34] Perhaps the house that philosopher Karsten Harries had built for himself and his wife in Vieques, Puerto Rico, by architect Edward Knowles is not just "open to the seemingly eternal firmament" and "allow[s] the morning sun to wake [him and his wife] and draw [them] out of the house" but also expresses how humans should relate to the firmament.[35] Nevertheless, in general the means of architecture are too indeterminate to convey any particular, precise meaning. In his remarkable book on Bramante, Pier Paolo Tamburelli imputes the recognition of this fact to the Renaissance architect:

> Bramante *renounced linguistic invention*, but this does not mean that he tried to shelter his work from language. On the contrary, he designed deliberately sticky buildings, able to let themselves be covered with words, to become figures, to celebrate and advertise – it didn't matter what. Bramante was willing to pretend that buildings could

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[33] The case of Hegel would be another story; see P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 119–143.
[34] K. Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, pp. 184–187.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 193–195.

speak, if that was a condition of making them. Nothing was precluded: Bramante saw "meanings" as essentially uncontrollable and transitory and therefore endless negotiable and adaptable to the requirements of the client. His lack of confidence in the possibility of communicating through architecture ended up justifying the most extreme opportunism.[36]

Supposing this to be right about Bramante, then his position is a subtle but profound correction to Kant: whereas the philosopher is confident that even architecture can express abstract ideas although indeterminately, the indeterminacy of such expression being necessary to their beauty ("free play"), the architect realizes that indeterminacy is the enemy of any particular expression at all – any meaning can be inscribed into a particular building by an observer so inclined, which means that it does not make sense to talk of the building as really having a particular meaning at all. Architecture and philosophy should not be conjoined in this way, because the conjunction will generally fail.

Nevertheless, there remains an important connection between architecture and philosophy, or one that ought to obtain, and this is one that links the first, popular conception of philosophy as a conception of how people should live with one part of the academic subject of philosophy, namely ethics, or morality. Of course, architects ought to be legally and ethically scrupulous in their dealings with others, just as everyone ought to be, but especially those in a position to spend large amounts of other people's money and to affect how their lives are going to go for some significant period of time. But architects have the special burden of bringing to the conference table a view of how life, or a part of life, might and should be lived – a philosophy in the first sense – but also of remaining open to the actual views of others, the client, other stakeholders, the general public – an ethical burden, thus part of philosophy in its more specialized sense. Frank Lloyd Wright's exposition of the principles of his "organicism" offers a good example of how a particular conception of how life should be lived must be combined with ethical principles valid for all. Wright's organicism is his philosophy, in the everyday sense of the term, that humans are part of nature, that our buildings, particularly our homes, should open us up to nature as far as is practicable (depending on climate, need for privacy, etc.), but perhaps also represent our link to

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[36]   P. P. Tamburelli, *On Bramante*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2022, p. 116.

nature by themselves fitting into their sites, using materials in natural form where possible (fieldstone, etc.), natural colors, and so on. "A building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings if Nature is manifest there [...] Colors require the same conventionalizing process to make them fit to live with that natural forms do; so go to the woods and fields for color schemes. [...] Bring out the nature of the materials, let their nature intimately into your scheme." This might well be thought to have been Wright's personal philosophy, in the everyday sense in which a philosophy can be personal, and something that might be imposed upon clients who had different personal philosophies, different conceptions of how they would like to relate to nature. But Wright's creed also included what we might think of as an ethical aspect that is more objective than idiosyncratic, and that is or can be formulated in ethics as a part of philosophy in its more specialized sense: "There should be as many kinds (styles) of houses as there are kinds (styles) of people and as many differentiations as there are individuals," he says, in other words, architects are not simply to impose their own philosophies on their clients, but to recognize the preferences of the clients as well, and ideally to work out designs that express the preferences of both architects and clients. Indeed, Wright's creed even included concern for the financial well-being of his clients, for their houses as investments: "A house that has character has a good chance of growing more valuable as it grows older while a house in the prevailing mode, whatever that mode may be, is soon out of fashion, stale, and unprofitable."[37] Whether Wright actually lived up to his creed is, of course, another matter, as it always is when it comes to compliance with rather than the content of moral principles: allegedly, when Herbert Johnson, Wright's client for one of his greatest accomplishments, the Johnson Wax office and research complex in Racine, Wisconsin (1936-1950), called Wright to complain that the roof of the house that Wright had also designed (1927-1939) for him was leaking right over him in the midst of a dinner party, the architect told his client just to move his seat over a few inches – not treating his patron and his needs with much respect, indeed biting the hand that had fed him. But that personal failing does not detract from the fact that Wright's creed, as stated three decades earlier, actually represented a double conjunction of architecture and philosophy: first, Wright's architecture was informed

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[37] All from F. L. Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture, I," *Architectural Record*, March, 1908, p. 157; previously cited in P. Guyer, *A Philosopher Looks at Architecture*, p. 131.

by a philosophy of human nature and its proper place in the rest of na-
ture, and second his practice of architecture was supposed to be governed
not merely by whatever public laws and codes might be in force where
and when he built but also by objectively valid moral principles. Yet at
no point did Wright appear to suppose that his buildings should *say* or
express any of this: the buildings and the process of building should *ex-
emplify* both his philosophy of life and objective ethical constraints on
simply imposing one's own philosophy of life on others, but not try to
articulate concepts in a non-conceptual medium.

On an initial reading, Kant might appear to have tried to insulate
art, including architecture, from morality altogether. He famously illus-
trates his claim that judgments of taste, that is, judgments about beauty,
are independent of "interest" in the existence of their objects, whether
personal and prudential or moral, with this example:

> If someone asks me whether I find the palace before me beautiful, I
> may well say that I don't like that sort of thing, which is made merely
> to be gaped at, . . . in true *Rousseauesque* style I might even vilify the
> vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such super-
> fluous things . . . All of this might be conceded to me and approved;
> but that is not what is at issue here. One only wants to know whether
> the mere representation of the object is accompanied with pleasure
> in me, however indifferent I might be with regard to the existence of
> the object of this representation.[38]

But the point of this passage is only to highlight a feature of our
specific response to beauty and therefore the proper object of a "pure"
judgment of taste, namely that it is a response to the "representation" or
appearance of an object, the response that Kant will then characterize
as the free play of imagination and understanding with that represen-
tation. But Kant is by no means here characterizing what should be the
whole of our response to even a beautiful artifact or what should be our
all-things-considered judgment of it. Beautiful objects in non-human
nature are not products of human intentional action and therefore not
liable to moral evaluation, to be sure, but all free human actions are po-
tentially subject to moral evaluation, and therefore their products are
as well – there may be such a thing as "poetic license" when it comes to

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[38] I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §2, 5:204–205.

departing from established conventions of rhythm, rhyme, and diction to achieve a new effect, and similarly in other arts, but there is no such thing as "artistic license" when it comes to moral evaluation of the conditions under which objects are produced and their effects on the human beings who use or encounter them – how the needs of clients are recognized, how their money is spent, the labor conditions while a building is being constructed including those within the architectural office as well as on the job-site, the environmental impacts of the material used and the operation of the finished building, and much more. These are morally relevant aspects of the actual practice of architecture, and subject to moral evaluation like other human actions and activities. Much later in his text Kant suggests this point when he writes that "If the beautiful arts are not combined, whether closely or at distance, with moral ideas, which alone carry with them a self-sufficient satisfaction, [...] their ultimate fate" will be to make the "spirit" of the would-be appreciator "dull, the object by and by loathsome, and the mind, because it is aware that its disposition is contrapurposive in the judgment of reason," that is, pure practical reason, in other words, morality, "dissatisfied with itself and moody."[39] Here Kant has in mind that to be enduringly pleasurable art should have some moral *content*, and I have already argued that thinking of architecture as possibly let alone necessarily having conceptual content of an abstract character is not a promising way to think about it. But Kant's point may be generalized to suggest that even when from a strictly aesthetic point of view a work of architecture or other art might be found beautiful or otherwise satisfactory, moral considerations certainly can and must enter into our all-things-considered response to objects, and something immoral, for example in the circumstances of the production of an object, can certainly render us "dissatisfied" with ourselves if we focus exclusively on its beauty or other aesthetic appeal.

    This is not to say that every moral judgment that we might make about an artist, architect or otherwise, must preclude any enjoyment of their work. Either psychologically or morally, we might not need to take Dickens's failings as a husband or a parent as sufficient reason not to enjoy *Great Expectations* or *Bleak House*, Wright's abandonment of his first wife as a reason to reject all his work after the Prairie period, Picasso's acceptance of the conditions of life in German-occupied Paris as a reason to stop enjoying his painting (although perhaps its manifest sexism would

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[39] *Ibid.*, §52, 5:325.

be a sufficient reason to turn away from some of his work), or Corbusier's continuing to work in Vichy France as a reason to stop admiring his buildings (if we do admire them). But there are moral limits: some of the official architecture of Fascist Italy or even Nazi Germany was actually pretty good, in much the same way that some of the simplified neo-Roman Classicism of the US in the 1930s was also pretty good (for example, the Philadelphia General Post Office, now an Internal Revenue Service processing facility), but yet our well-founded moral disapprobation of the first two regimes might reasonably be extended to their surviving buildings, entailing perhaps if not that they should be torn down then at least that money should not be spent on their preservation or that their continued existence should be accompanied by official disclaimers of the values they originally represented, while no right-thinking person should have any qualms about preserving and/or adaptively re-using structures built at a high-point for social democracy in the US. And even if such real-life cases may be complex, as philosophers well-practiced in cooking up thought-experiments we can readily imagine cases where moral considerations must outweigh any aesthetic considerations. Imagine that instead of being a dauber, the young Adolf Hitler had actually been a good and successful painter before turning to the political career that he actually had: we certainly would still not want to hang his paintings in our museums of fine arts. Or Hitler's actual "Eagle's Nest" at Berchtesgaden, not designed by him but built for him: shouldn't it have been leveled, regardless of how good a piece of architecture it might have been, rather than turned into a tourist attraction?! Aesthetic considerations aside, architecture is no more immune from normal moral evaluation than is any other intentional human action or its product. That is the most important point about architecture *and* philosophy.

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