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Architecture of life

*Aimer Molière, c'est être guéri à jamais,
je ne dis pas de la basse et infâme hypocrisie,
mais du genre, de ce qui fait anathématiser et maudire*¹
Charles-Augustin Saint-Beuve (1804–1869)

Leon Jan Piniński – a count, lawyer, historian of art, professor at Lviv University and member of Academy of Learning, honoured by *Złoty Wawrzyn Akademicki*² (Golden Academic Laurus) in his short study, which was published in 1912 as a commemorative book for the 250th jubilee of Lviv University, wrote that mankind is proud of civilisation, progress and astounding inventions. However, he expressed doubts whether through centuries, which separate us from the ancient times, this mankind ‘significantly advanced in the field of soul and heart’.

One century is over and similar reflections are still present. At the beginning of the 21st century, Anthony Grayling – a professor of philosophy at London University and member of St. Anne’s College in Oxford evoked a general interest in ethics. It was due to his last books which were a result of his systematic research and constituted collections of lively well-written studies and essays. Robert Jan van Pelt, a professor of architecture at Canadian University of Waterloo emphasized their significance for modern architects³. In 1999, within the framework of the ‘Forecasts for

the 21st century’ series, a small book by Grayling entitled ‘*Moral Values*’ was published. This book contained interesting observations concerning the present condition, changes and outlooks of liberal and humanistic ethics in the globalizing world. The author states that despite the fact that nowadays numerous apparently incomprehensible and uncontrolled forces influence our life, the values that were worked out by civilization still remain unchanged and along with ethics they serve man’s development and existence. They are based on respect for autonomy and freedom of a human being, while an arduous process of their internalization shapes our personalities. At present, these values are lively and fresh for ethics in the same way they were when Socrates formulated them for the first time 2500 years ago in Athens. It must be mentioned that also Professor Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński in his book ‘*Profession-Architect*’ calls Socrates ‘the father of ethics’ and refers his views to the specificity of our profession [6, p. 42].

For ancient philosophers the entire life was a matter of ethics. They believed that man lives as a whole and only living in this way is it possible to live appropriately. Both the development and its impingement on others result from a personality which is indivisible. No one has a personality which is separated into professional, family, social ones... Our life should be well thought-out; as Socrates put it: [...] *Not life, but good life, is to be chiefly valued* [4, p. 18].

Taking into account these categories, we can notice that if a professional life as an important element of the entire existence of man is deprived of a plan or principles, it becomes so defenceless against fate and to such a large extent depends on decisions and actions of other people that for everyone who lives in this way such a life has

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¹ To like Moliere means to be cured forever, I’m not saying that of low and mean hypocrisy, but of lack of tolerance and insensitivity which results in putting curses and condemning (translated by the author).

² We must complement this list by mentioning that L. Piniński was a parliamentarian in the Galician Sejm for many years, at the turn of the 20th century he fulfilled the function of Governor of the Galician Province and until the end of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire he was a member of the Vienna House of Lords. [from:] Marek Aureliusz, *Rozmyślania*, PIW, Warszawa 1997, afterword by Grzegorz Żurek.

³ Inter alia, see: [9].

only a minimum value. Also, when it comes to an architect, if this is the case, there is no possibility to achieve a good professional level.

This truth often escapes our awareness. We rarely think about the difference between morality and ethics. There are many definitions of these two concepts in literature, for example, Karol Wojtyła defines morality as a moral life and says that it is [...] *life which is simply human, both individual and social, understood in the light of norms* [10, p. 13]. Morality refers to something that is permitted or prohibited in our behaviours. On the other hand, ethics refers to the quality of a person and the quality of this person's life [4, p. 18]. Normative ethics is one of the branches of ethics which deals with values and general moral principles. According to Richard B. Brandt [1, p. 20], all ethics (including ethics of the architect's profession) as a theory attempts to arrive at a set of true ethical principles. This code ought to be complete which means that each true ethical statement concerning the architect's professional conduct can be deducted from this code (having an appropriate set of non-ethical premises referring to facts constituting the professional knowledge). It should also be as economical as possible with regard to notions and principles. In order to solve problems which occur in practice, it is not enough to have 'intuition' or a reasonable 'judgment'. Clarity and certainty in relation to particular cases can be achieved only when a system of basic principles has been built. If we reject or forget about an ideal of a complete but economical set of general principles, professional ethics becomes something like a construction without a design. Some years ago Lord Nolan's commission that worked on the Code of Ethical Principles of a Member of Parliament in England limited the number of principles to eight basic rules assuming that it is possible to deduct all the detailed rules from them. It would be interesting to analyse our code in this aspect.

Thus, ethics is not based – as it is the case with morality – on particular principles or codes, categorical warnings or precisely defined penalties. Its crucial task is to shape a tactful and tolerant human being whose personality is characterised by the ability to care about another person, to have insight into another person's heart and understand his problems. Therefore, the main idea of our professional ethics ought to be the formation of an ethical community of architects composed of such individuals. Hence, there would be no need to have any permissions or prohibitions, which create architects' morality, because these rules would already be part of mutual respect and tolerance. Morality is a social creation because it exists in the form created by history of a whole community as well as of our professional group.

The aforementioned Grayling recalls Socrates' teaching that a good life has a face and direction. It is a life which is in accordance with values; it is based on remote purposes and long-term activities which we are faithful to both in the real time and in the unpredictable future. Such a life should be lived with strong determination and deliberation as well as with willingness to make sacrifices. *Considering these matters resembles studying a map before setting off* – writes the author of 'Moral Values'. It

is a project that should be done individually by everybody. This map makes it possible to have a good grasp of the terrain which cannot be experienced in any other way: *Man who does not care about the way of his life is like a foreigner who moves without a map on the strange territory, is lost, does not know a proper direction and each path he takes is as good as all the other ones. If it leads him to a good place, it is just a coincidence* [3, p. VIII]. It is also worth noticing here that the philosophy of development and psychotherapeutic theory, which was created by a famous Polish doctor, psychologist and philosopher Professor Kazimierz Dąbrowski, constitutes a different expression of the same beliefs as regards the language.

Grayling claims that man is able to follow the path of life using this map on the condition that he is aware of all ways – including those which he will never tread – because his choice is based on the knowledge of alternatives. Only when we are faced with many possibilities can we make decisions which are wise and at the same time free. This kind of situation is very common in our professional work which is aimed at creating living conditions of other people. Therefore, an architect can shape his life and behave ethically only when he learns about other people's lives and takes into account the experiences that he does not have and will probably never have. He must be able to imagine the life of a homeless pauper; being a man – get into the spirit of a woman; being a liberal – try to see the world with a fundamentalist's eyes. If we wish to have an ethical life and create good architecture, we need to experience.

According to Grayling, books open up new worlds before our eyes and deepen our perception of the reality, they teach us *to understand on a much bigger scale, see more details, comprehend in a much more precise way* [2, p. 21]. It is not enough, however, to learn possible ways by means of literature. We need to go further. Without observing the examples of particular lives or the real architecture, a plan which is based on book experiences is merely an abstraction. In this context, a person who teaches ethics becomes really important. I mean both an academic teacher as well as a member of the Chamber of Architects who run the practice preceding the granting of rights to conduct a profession; we must bear in mind that the architect's education consists of academic education complemented by a three-year long period of professional practice. The practice supervisor ought to be able to share his own professional experiences and reflections and it is even advisable for him to take on the role of – let us again quote Karol Wojtyła – *an institution of spiritual or internal leadership* [10].

According to Grayling, *the street is a classroom for the observer's eyes*. This is the view which explicitly evokes memories of Louis Kahn's words – a great architect, urban planner, researcher and critic: *The city is a place where a small boy can see something that tells him what he would like to do for the rest of his life* [8, p. 114]. We must learn through looking at the city and its architecture as a Grayling's passer-by or a Kahn's small searching boy – looking at architecture as a frame of a performance which is full of life solutions. An academic teacher –

architect, an experienced person with a broad humanistic knowledge and who is able to show around the city of ethics where [...] *Plato, Socrates, Descartes or Hegel have their own houses* [7], should visit this city with his students, see interiors, admire views from windows and make dialogues with residents. Such a teacher should help them search for their own place in the profession. All the ambitions, possibilities and fears of the modern city touch us directly or at least potentially we are aware of them. It is worth passing on the knowledge that it is not enough to perceive the city as a theatre that we just happen to visit. The broadly perceived city can lead each person to make a conscious choice of one way out of many possible ways.

So, there appears the question of how exacting we are towards ourselves. We can still do more... We can make an attempt at creating the urban and architectural city form as a sort of a relief map which would offer residents some ethical coordinates or perhaps an outline of an ethical life plan. Influence of the city architecture – blend of streets, lanes, squares, boulevards, railway stations, houses, shops, market squares, factories, temples, bill-posts, theatres, schools, libraries and many other buildings can be helpful in changing people's limitations, xenophobia and a closed world of moral commandments into a much freer, more cosmopolitan and open universe which is set free from constraints by means of ethical thinking. A didactic role of the city ought to be recognised at last. However, Grayling's reflections will not be helpful here unless we think it over ourselves.

Architects need a broadly perceived spiritual life, they must have knowledge and a habit of thinking. There is a relation between architecture and the quality of spiritual life of its creators. According to Heidegger, the ability to build depends on the ability to live in a given place and it is necessary to have a habit of thinking to achieve both of these skills. An indispensable feature that architects need is also the ability to think in order to build structures which serve the purpose of living: *Building and thinking, each in its own way, are essential to live in a given place. However, these two are not enough for living while they act separately instead of listening to each other* [5, p. 142].

To put these postulates into practice, we need – apart from strictly professional knowledge – humanistic education. *Isn't it true that philosophical knowledge, especially in the scope of ethics, supports good aspects resulting from the realisation of a particular design?* – asks Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński having in mind Socrates' thoughts. Unfortunately, secondary school ceased being a place where students are taught how to think long ago. Tadeusz Gadacz – a remarkable contemporary philosopher from Warsaw – as well as a student and co-worker of priest Professor Józef Tischner – defines this situation in the following way: [...] *the Polish school is not a good place for people who think. It is rather the institution where experts and work-force are supposed to be educated. However, work-force is not enough to make the country develop in the long run. To this end, we need people and citizens who are able to think seriously about the world in which they live and are capable of making choices in the range of life and*

politics. If we do not change our schools at least a little, we shall follow the downward path [7, p. 9].

However, before we can enjoy the effects of changes postulated by Professor Gadacz, it seems that our curriculum of architectural studies is in great need of broadening knowledge in the scope of philosophy, criticism of art and criticism of architecture. Students also must be encouraged to deepen their knowledge of literature. These subjects ought to be treated in the same way as practical education. The current condition of minds was further confirmed by discussions conducted at one of our faculties by representatives of students and representatives of National Accreditation Commission. The participants of this discussion tackled the alleged need to reduce the number of humanistic subjects in the existing curriculum, with history of architecture in the first place. This is an explicit example of a total lack of awareness that humanistic education provides not only information about the architectural past. In a sense, it opens up a possibility of a wiser professional life which is based to a greater extent on knowledge. It guarantees a better understanding of human experiences and feelings now and in the future, wherever we happen to practice the profession. It gives a chance to understand needs, interests and aspirations of other people, including our clients. Hence, it allows us to arouse an attitude of respect and kindness towards these people, which is a condition of proper discharge of professional duties.

However, broad humanistic education does not constitute a common ideal today. Still it is emphasized that the most important thing is to prepare students to get a job. It seems to be a misunderstanding since the purpose of broad and humanistic education is to prepare people who can learn on their own. The people who think and look for answers and solutions they need and they finally find them because they know where the paths leading to them are. A tendency, which is dominating today, brings bad results also in the professional life as it often happens that getting a job and finding a place in the architectural service market becomes a superior value to which principles of the profession are subordinated. However, settling detailed ethical issues concerning architecture requires the ability to think and deduce. A starting point here constitutes basic principles of ethics from which – on the basis of true premises deriving from the architectural theory and practice – derivative theorems are developed.

Thus, humanistic education is necessary to understand and develop professional ethics. Architects themselves must work on this process, not only philosophers or lawyers. Only architects have specialist knowledge that is necessary to apply general principles in the range of their domain in an appropriate way. On the other hand, it is not possible to formulate a good selection of basic general ethical principles without taking into consideration more specific moral problems. There are no good reasons for accepting a particular collection of basic principles until their consequences can be known for the particular problems.

The defense of one's own rules and ethical declarations is part of each normative ethics. According to Brandt [1], a rule of physics must be proved in the course of an

experiment (or proved by means of another method) in the same way as the acceptance of ethical rules requires justification. Giving such a justification is part of professional ethics. Unjustified ethical rules are similar to theories in physics which cannot be proved. If we wish to formulate ethics of a profession, we must be ready to take up some appropriate steps; first of all, we have to defend this ethical system actively. The architect's profession ethics shall be more developed as long as we provide stronger arguments for its systematic defense.

We must conclude that there is more to our profession than achieving a visual harmony – even if the discussion about the relations between ethics and architecture were difficult and full of paradoxes. Let us repeat again the words of Socrates who called the Athenians to be con-

sciously reasonable towards their own lives if they wanted to shape them and direct them in a unique way in the society which represented particular ideas. Socrates made his speeches to the residents who populated the civic city space which expressed these ethical challenges by means of sophisticated architectural terms [9, p. 52]. Today, architects are members of the profession that co-creates the future – something that does not exist yet but is waiting to be created. To a large extent, our future depends on our attitudes and our decisions. It is our duty – as professional architects who declared to serve architecture, i.e. people – to define what kind of persons we want to be and what kind of life we want to have as well as to make wise choices while designing and acting as professionals.

Translated by B. Setkowicz

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