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INTRODUCTION

Ethics and the built environment

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Major theoretical and practical developments dating back variously over the last century, and in some cases longer, have contributed to a revolution in ethics in the last two to three decades. On the theoretical side, I have in mind developments as significant as those of post-Big Bang physics, post-Darwinian evolutionary biology and ecology, the emerging cognitive sciences and the emerging study of complex adaptive systems – in short, the sciences of matter, life, mind and complexity-in-general. These sciences have collectively fuelled the development of a naturalistic, evolutionary understanding of the universe and all that it contains, which, in turn, has stimulated (at least for many) a fundamental rethinking of humanity's place in the larger scheme of things. On the practical side, the emerging anthropogenic (i.e. humanly caused) ecological crisis has been leading us to question the ways in which we dwell upon the Earth. Taken together, these major theoretical and practical challenges to our previous self-understandings and ways of living have led, just since the 1970s, to the development of an emerging field of philosophy known as 'environmental philosophy' or, more particularly, 'environmental ethics'.

As its name suggests, environmental ethics is, or at least ought to be, concerned with examining any and all ethical questions that arise with respect to a moral agent's interactions with any and all aspects of the world around her or him. This *includes* other humans, since environmental ethics typically *begins* with an analysis of the reasons why we believe humans to be deserving of moral consideration and why we have, until quite recently, denied such consideration to the non-human world. Thus, if its full implications are grasped, environmental ethics represents the most general form of ethics we have. Far from being a minor, 'applied ethics' offshoot of the field of enquiry hitherto known simply as *ethics*, environmental ethics actually represents a vast enlargement of that field

of enquiry. This is because, as just implied, the field of ethics to date has been profoundly human-centred in its range of concerns and therefore effectively constitutes a *subset* – albeit an astonishingly elaborated subset – of the range of concerns addressed by environmental ethics (see, for example, Fox 1995 and 1996; Zimmerman 1998). There is therefore a strong case for referring to environmental ethics as 'general ethics' and referring to traditional human-centred ethics as 'anthropocentric ethics', that is, as that subset of general ethics that deals with human-centred ethical concerns.

However, just as traditional, anthropocentrically focused forms of ethics have exhibited a major blind spot in their theorising with respect to the non-human world, so the development of environmental ethics has thus far exhibited a major blind spot of its own – and, to that extent, not fully realised its own implications. This 'blind spot' flows from the following basic fact: the world around us – what we call 'the environment' – consists of both spontaneously occurring and humanly constructed environments. For convenience, we label these the 'natural environment' and the 'built environment', and this natural/built environment distinction is perhaps the most obvious division that we can make in the day-to-day world in which we live. When you look out of your window, you may see, on the one hand, trees, the sky and, perhaps, some birds; on the other hand, houses, roads and cars. These things are all mixed together in your field of view, but some of them belong to the spontaneously self-organising natural world and some of them belong to the intentionally organised built environment (including cars and other artefacts on the broad understanding we are employing here, since cars are part of the intentionally organised, built – or constructed – environment even though they are not 'buildings'). In addition there are many, many examples of what we might call 'mixed' environments all around us. These are becoming increasingly common as humans intentionally engineer and put to use the spontaneous self-organising processes of the natural world – from the back garden to the brave new world of genetic modification.

Yet, despite the fact that the world around us – 'the environment' – consists of both natural and built environments (and their various admixtures), environmental ethics, as a formal field of enquiry, has been overwhelmingly focused upon the spontaneously self-organising, 'natural' environment, as opposed to the humanly created, or intentionally organised, *built* environment. It seems, then, that *environmental* ethics has not yet truly earned the name that it presently goes under, let alone the name *general ethics*, which would be an even better way of describing the field if its full implications were realised.

On the one hand, this bias towards concerns with the natural

environment is completely understandable: environmental ethicists have wanted to escape the almost exclusively anthropocentric focus that has pervaded traditional ethical approaches and so have deliberately directed their attentions to the non-human world in order to redress this imbalance. On the other hand, however, this bias is decidedly odd for at least two reasons. First, the development of any truly comprehensive environmental ethics (which would then amount to a general ethics) obviously demands the development of an ethic which is broad enough to address ethical questions that arise in all manner of environments – natural, built and mixed. Second, whereas humans evolved in natural, or spontaneously self-organising environments, we now increasingly live in built, or intentionally organised environments, and these built environments draw mightily upon the free 'goods and services' provided by the spontaneously self-organising realm of Nature (see Chapter 2, by Girardet, 'Greening Urban Society'). In consequence, it should be obvious that how we build these environments and how we live in them is a question of prime importance, not only for the preservation and flourishing of humans themselves, but also for the preservation and flourishing of the whole non-human realm of Nature. The fate of the 'green bits' of the planet is now inextricably bound up with – indeed, effectively at the mercy of – the future of the 'brown bits'.

However, as significant as these theoretical and practical issues are, no field of enquiry presently exists that is clearly and explicitly devoted to the subject of what we would call *the ethics of the built environment* or (perhaps more simply, and with more of an emphasis on process rather than outcome) *the ethics of building*. That said, it is true that some philosophers have occasionally attempted explicitly to address ethical issues associated with the *built* environment, and it is also true that some commentators coming more from a design and architecture background have also occasionally attempted explicitly to address *ethical* issues in this area. We can point to various contributions that might come to be viewed as 'early developments' in the field of the ethics of the built environment, once this field gets going as a formally recognised field of enquiry. For example, the art historian David Watkin's *Morality and Architecture* (1977) (critically discussed by Nigel Taylor in this volume); the philosopher Dale Jamieson's paper on 'The City Around Us' (1984) (thanks to Andrew Light for drawing this paper to my attention); the philosopher Avner De-Shalit's paper 'Urban Preservation and the Judgement of Solomon' (1994) (thanks to Doris Schroeder for drawing this paper to my attention); the designer Victor Papanek's *The Green Imperative: Ecology and Ethics in Design and Architecture* (1995); the Heideggerean-influenced philosopher Karsten Harries' *The Ethical*

Function of Architecture (1997) (critically discussed by Saul Fisher in this volume); the philosopher Alastair Gunn's paper 'Rethinking Communities: Environmental Ethics in an Urbanized World' (1998); and, as this book is going to press, the philosopher Roger King's paper 'Environmental Ethics and the Built Environment' (2000). On the whole, however, contributions that attempt explicitly to address ethical issues associated with the built environment have thus far been few and far between, whether they have come at this topic from the philosophical side or the design and architecture side. This point is reinforced by most, if not all of the philosophical contributions in the preceding list (as it is by a number of the contributors to this volume). For example, Jamieson began his 1984 paper by saying:

> It may seem *odd* to many people that a book devoted to environmental ethics includes an essay on the city. We often speak of the environment as if it is everywhere except where we live (italics added).
>
> (Jamieson 1984: 38)

Fourteen years later, Gunn began his paper along similar lines:

> Unfortunately, the central concerns of environmental ethics have been and largely continue to be heavily slanted towards animals, plants, endangered species, wilderness, and traditional cultures and not toward the problems of life in industrialized, urbanized society where most people now live.
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> (Gunn 1998: 34)

In short, the discussion of the built environment was unusual in environmental ethics then (Jamieson 1984) and still remains unusual (Gunn 1998). King (2000: 115) rightly sees this 'lack of attention' (to the built environment) as 'a lost opportunity for environmental ethics.'

The aim of this volume, then, is to contribute towards the accumulation of a critical mass of ideas and questions that will enable the discussion of *the ethics of the built environment* (or *the ethics of building*) to take off as a field of enquiry in its own right. This volume therefore brings together, on the one hand, philosophers (especially ethicists) with an interest in architecture, planning and building and, on the other hand, philosophically oriented architects, planners and other analysts of the built environment. The aim is to create an informed interdisciplinary forum in which to:

1 widen and deepen the debate on the ethical dimensions of building in all its forms from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and approaches;
2 contribute significantly towards establishing an agenda for the future development of these issues; and
3 propose some tentative solutions to the kinds of questions that arise when we contemplate the ethics of building.

To this end, excluding the introduction and the conclusion, the chapters that constitute this volume have been divided into three parts of five chapters, grouped under the headings: The Green Imperative – and its Vicissitudes; Building with Greater Sensitivity to People(s) and Places; and Steps Towards a Theory of the Ethics of the Built Environment. As a generalisation, the book moves from contributions that are more empirically, practically or policy oriented to those that are more theoretically oriented.

The volume opens by examining 'The Green Imperative – and its Vicissitudes' (the first part of the title being borrowed from Papanek's 1995 book of the same name). Any book on the ethics of the built environment produced at this point in global history simply has to begin with the 'green' imperative of sustainability, which links directly to issues of human intra-generational justice, human intergenerational justice, the ethics of the human–non-human relationship (including the preservation of global biodiversity) and, ultimately, questions concerning the richness, beauty and even survival of life on Earth. Although the objective of sustainability carries a 'green' tag, it is now endorsed (in theory at least) by governments internationally. As Roger Talbot and Gian Carlo Magnoli point out in their contribution to this volume, before the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission (the World Commission for Environment and Development) 'it was difficult to identify any official social, economic or indeed environmental policies that recognised sustainable development as a significant policy objective' (see p. 91), whereas since the publication of Agenda 21, following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), 'it is difficult to identify government policy statements that do not'(see p. 91).

The principle of sustainability is now also endorsed by internationally recognised architectural leaders (see, for example, Richard Rogers, *Cities for a Small Planet*, based on his Reith Lectures of 1995) as well as by the profession of architecture as a whole. At the level of the profession of architecture itself, for example, The Union of International Architects declared at their World Congress in 1993 that they would commit themselves, individually and professionally, to 'place environmental and

social sustainability at the core of our practices and professional responsibilities.' Their 'Declaration of Interdependence for a Sustainable Future' goes on to commit the profession, *inter alia*, to educate all their professional contacts, including others in the building industry, clients and students, about the 'critical importance and substantial opportunities of sustainable design', and to 'establish policies, regulations and practices in government and business that ensure *sustainable design becomes normal practice'* (my italics). Thus, as Simon Guy and Graham Farmer note (this volume, p. 73, quoting Sudjic), it is now the case that 'for any architect not to profess passionate [ethical] commitment to "green" buildings is professional suicide'.

Why has this transformation come about? The basic reasons are now well known. First, an increasing proportion of the planet's still wildly increasing numbers of people are choosing or being forced to live in densely built urban developments. These developments constitute such massive resource sinks and waste generators on a global scale that, as Talbot and Magnoli put it (this volume, p. 92), '...present forms of urban development are clearly and unequivocally unsustainable'. Yet, second, and realistically, 'it is simply not possible to envisage a future that is not rooted in urban living' (ibid.). Crunch! These facts of the matter explain, in essence, why the green imperative of sustainability must now lie at the heart of considerations regarding the built environment in general. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that few matters are of more importance to the future of both humanity *and* the non-human world than the ways in which humans construct their built environments and live their day-to-day lives in those environments. This applies particularly in the case of our most densely built, most densely populated and fastest growing built environments – cities. Thus, as Maf Smith, John Whitelegg (one of the contributors to this volume) and Nick Williams argue in their important recent book *Greening the Built Environment* (1998: 214): 'The built environment must be seen not only as the major source of environmental problems, but also as the locus of the solution to these problems.'

But why should a book concerning the *ethics* of building begin with the issue of sustainability? Why not leave that issue to the technical skills of architects, builders, planners, and so on, and just let them 'get on with it'? Again, the reason should be obvious – *achieving a sustainable way of living is not just a technical issue (although it is often discussed as if it were), but also (and fundamentally) an ethical one*. As Terry Williamson and Antony Radford put it (this volume, pp. 57–58): 'If ethics deals with the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, then the notion of a 'sustainable' architecture

expressed in these statements [i.e. by national and international organisations of architects] is fundamentally an ethical issue.'

Notwithstanding the many fine words endorsing the principle of sustainability in government policy statements and from the architecture profession in general, those architects who are most genuinely and deeply committed to this principle typically see a massive gap between 'the talk' and 'the walk' – an observation that goes to basic moral questions concerning governmental honesty and professional integrity. But, as ever in the real world, the issues here are rarely so clear-cut. Even with the best will in the world, there are tremendously difficult questions involved in surmounting the gap between support in principle for the objective of sustainability ('the green imperative') and translating that support into practice – or even into a shared understanding at a more detailed level. Thus, the chapters in Part I of this volume go beyond simply extolling the cause of sustainability and explore the technical and especially the ethical complexities of the issues involved.

Herbert Girardet ('Greening Urban Society') sets the stage with a detailed overview of the present urban situation worldwide, drawing particular attention to the 'ecological footprint' and 'metabolism' of cities. He points out, for example, that the ecological footprint of London, 'the city that started it all', 'the mother of megacities', now extends to around 125 times its surface area – the equivalent of Britain's entire productive land! In the face of this sort of unsustainable situation, and drawing upon a worldwide perspective, Girardet outlines the directions in which urban society now needs to move and the resources that can be drawn upon to effect this change. John Whitelegg ('Building Ethics into the Built Environment') then proceeds with a case study approach in which he examines a range of ethical issues raised by some major recent projects – Heathrow Terminal 5, the Lancaster Local Plan and Calcutta's flyover project. Reflection upon these leads him to focus, in particular, on the ethically saturated issues of place identity, empowering local residents and communities, the ethics/economics tension and the role of professional ethics. He finds, among other things, that the transformation of the built environment along 'industrial and consumerist lines is creating future inequalities, inequities, social injustice, loss of community, loss of place identity and loss of a spiritual dimension to life.' Of particular relevance to the overall theme of this book is his follow-up observation to this point: 'All of these issues are ethical issues, *as is the absence of an ethical perspective from the built environment agenda itself*' (my italics), which speaks precisely to the rationale for this volume.

The next three chapters in Part I speak in various ways to the complex questions of translating the principle of sustainability into practice – and

even of understanding exactly what is meant by the green imperative of sustainability. Tom Woolley ('Green Building: Establishing Principles') addresses the ubiquity of 'greenwash' and 'enviro-speak' with respect to sustainable building practices and calls for the establishment of rigorously thought through principles in order to sort the genuinely sustainable (or at least more-sustainable-than-the-alternatives) from the greenwash. *En route*, Woolley observes that, despite the fact that we spend most of our lives in buildings, 'the issues of green building have failed to make much of an impact on public consciousness when compared with public concerns over food, medical and pollution issues'. Indeed, as Woolley notes, these issues have even failed to make much of an impact upon environmental organisations: 'Few [environmental organisations] take more than a passing interest in the subject of building. Most environmental organisations emphasise protecting the natural environment, and a recent study showed that many did little to change the environment in their own offices.' This constitutes an interesting parallel to my previous remarks regarding the overwhelming focus of environmental ethicists upon the natural environment and, hence, the built environment blind spot in environmental ethics. Terry Williamson and Antony Radford ('Building, Global Warming and Ethics') then focus on the single, but hugely significant, environmental issue of global warming and greenhouse gas emissions in order to explore in some detail the complexities of the link between sustainable building as an ethical issue and building design as a pragmatic activity. Finally in this section, Simon Guy and Graham Farmer ('Contested Constructions: The Competing Logics of Green Buildings and Ethics') provide a detailed analysis of six competing sets of interlocking ideas ('competing logics') that vie with and/or jostle each other in the literature on green building, and that we need to be aware of in order to make sense of the full range of debate in this area.

Part II of the volume is devoted to 'Building with Greater Sensitivity to People(s) and Places.' Roger Talbot and Gian Carlo Magnoli ('Social Inclusion and the Sustainable City') discuss the importance of social inclusion to the goal of ecological sustainability, with reference to urban developments/cities in general and the example of Edinburgh in particular. They devote particular attention to community learning as the primary means by which social inclusion can be facilitated. Bob Fowles ('Transformative Architecture: A Synthesis of Ecological and Participatory Design'), like Talbot and Magnoli, adopts systems ideas and a holistic perspective in discussing the importance of architects involving the people for whom they are designing in the design process itself. Based on practical experience, he observes that when people do

this 'they begin to critically examine broader ecological aspects of building design' and that 'the experience of many participants indicates that the synthesis of participation with an ecological agenda results in a significant personal level of change within themselves.' Fowles sees this personal transformation as an 'important ingredient in contributing to sustainable communities...and just as important as the creation of a socially responsible and ecologically sound architecture.' Paul Oliver ('Ethics and Vernacular Architecture') likewise emphasises the ethical lesson that 'Housing that involves the active participation of the community...is the most likely to succeed'. He graphically illustrates the importance of respect for 'the values, mores, building skills, experience and wisdom of the cultures whose housing needs are to be met' with a variety of examples drawn from his long-standing study of vernacular architecture around the world and argues that 'If the housing of the billions in the twenty-first century is not to result in design debacles of unprecedented scale, these are lessons in the ethics of building that must be learned.'

Following on the vernacular theme of building in the 'everyday environment', the architect Christopher Day ('Ethical Building in the Everyday Environment: A Multilayer Approach to Building and Place Design') seeks to overcome the false oppositions with which we often seem to be confronted (humanity *or* Nature, utility *or* beauty, society *or* ecology) by offering a thoroughly 'process-oriented' approach to building that takes into account the different 'levels of being' of a building and its place. These levels of being include its physical substance, its flow through time (its biography if you will), our own emotional responses to what we openly refer to as its moods, and, finally, what the place itself would say if it could speak (as distinct from us merely projecting a voice upon it), that is, if its essence, *genius loci* or spirit of place could speak. This is truly a 'multilayer approach' to building – one that might go further than some people would want to go, but then you should see the results! Finally in this section, Isis Brook ('Can "Spirit of Place" Be a Guide to Ethical Building?') follows on from Christopher Day's paper by focusing specifically on sensitivity towards 'place' as a guide to ethical building. She offers a critical but sympathetic analysis of the conceptually slippery, yet ancient and apparently indispensable notion of 'sense of place', '*genius loci*' or 'spirit of place'. Considering a phenomenon that seems to many to be both as real, yet as difficult to pin down as consciousness itself, Brook distinguishes and examines some ten or more 'shades of meaning' of this notion and points the way to its future development as a guide to ethical building.

Part III of the volume is overtly philosophical (a movement begun

with Brook's paper) and explores various 'Steps Towards a Theory of the Ethics of the Built Environment.' Mustafa Pultar begins this section ('The Conceptual Basis of Building Ethics') by reinforcing the point made in the opening section of this introduction when he says that 'there appears to be no well-established, coherent and systematic framework for a discussion of value-related issues in the analysis of building(s)'. He then provides a detailed overview of the range of values that need to be considered if we are to develop a firm and comprehensive 'basis for discussing building ethics.' Saul Fisher ('How to Think about the Ethics of Architecture') also reinforces the point made in the opening section of this introduction when he says that 'Philosophical ethicists have not yet fully explored, or even mapped out, the problems posed by architectural practice'. Advancing a number of reasons for 'why architecture merits its own branch of applied ethics', he then critically examines three current models of addressing ethical problems in architecture and finds each of them flawed in different ways. In contrast, he argues for the advantages of pressing the tried-and-tested analytical philosophical approach to ethics into the realm of the built environment and draws our attention to the guidance that can be offered in this task by drawing upon the already existing wealth of argument in the realm of architectural law.

As a generalisation, the chapters by Pultar and Fisher are formal in their approach, in the sense that they offer valuable general frameworks within which progress can be made in developing the ethics of the built environment: a range of values that pay close attention to the actual practices of building, in the case of Pultar's paper, and the analytical philosophical approach to ethics, amplified by the body of architectural law, in the case of Fisher's paper. In contrast, the remaining three chapters in this section are concerned more with arguing for substantive philosophical positions.

Keekok Lee ('The Taj Mahal and the Spider's Web') considers the ontological differences (i.e. the differences in fundamental modes of being or existence) between the purposively built, artefactual environment and its obvious contrast – the natural environment. She argues that these realms are 'two different types of being – they belong to two different and distinct ontological categories' and that our moral obligations towards these two realms differ in some rather fundamental ways. For example, while we might feel we have a moral obligation to preserve or repair great works of art (including buildings) with as little alteration as possible, it would be a serious mistake to adopt this approach towards the natural realm (effectively 'deep freezing' the natural world) because this would rob the natural realm of an essential ontological feature, namely, its dynamic and, by the same token, transient nature.

Where Lee considers the ontology/ethics nexus, Nigel Taylor ('Ethical Arguments About the Aesthetics of Architecture') turns his attention to the equally deep and tangled question of the ethics/aesthetics nexus and asks 'Are there any *ethical* grounds for praising, or criticising, the *aesthetic* content of buildings?' (my italics). This is a very important question to address in a volume of this kind precisely because many people have had the experience of wishing to register what they feel is an essentially moral objection against the form of a building (even that 'There ought to be a law against it!') only to have their objection interpreted as (and often, in their own eyes, *reduced* to) an *aesthetic* objection that carries no *moral* weight. Taylor carefully considers (and rejects) three likely candidate answers to the question of whether there are ethical grounds for praising or criticising the aesthetic content of buildings before then advancing a positive answer to this question, based on the degree of *care* or aesthetic *attentiveness* that has gone into a building.

I begin the concluding contribution ('Towards an Ethics (or at Least a Value Theory) of the Built Environment') to Part III by asking whether questions concerning the ethics of building are in fact reducible to other, more familiar, kinds of ethical concern. If this were the case then, at a fundamental level, the very idea of an ethics of the built environment *per se* would be unnecessary – 'surplus to moral requirements'. I argue against this that there is a foundational principle at work in value theory in general and ethics (as a subset of value theory) in particular, and that the recognition of this foundational principle provides a basis for both (1) recognising the ethics of the built environment as a legitimate (non-theoretically reducible) area of enquiry in its own right and (2) judging some forms of the built environment as better or worse than others *in principle* (i.e. irrespective of the preferences, interests or desires of observers).

The book concludes on an agenda-setting note ('Conclusion: Towards an Agenda for the Ethics of the Built Environment'). This conclusion briefly sets out, in an ethically systematic way, the kinds of questions that have been discussed herein and that will set the agenda for the future development of enquiry into the ethics of the built environment.

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It remains to say two things. First, that it is the collective hope of the authors who have contributed to this volume that it will contribute both fruitful ideas and inspirational energy to the, by now, well overdue development of a vigorous and full-blown area of enquiry into the ethics of the built environment. Second, that it is likewise the collective hope

of these authors that the most critically robust ideas in this area of enquiry will inspire, guide and increasingly come to be reflected in the real-world practices of creating, preserving and, where appropriate, destroying the built environment.

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