

Liberalized professional code of ethics to provoke thought?

By [Randy W. Bright](#) August 7, 2014

Several articles regarding professional ethics in architectural practices appeared recently in Architectural Record, a professional magazine that I receive each month as a part of my membership in the American Institute of Architects.

The first article was an editorial explaining that, "In this issue of RECORD, we feature a special report on ethics and architecture. The American Institute of Architects maintains a code of ethics for professional conduct, but we are looking at the subject more broadly - from the problems of migrant construction workers to the design of affordable housing; from refusing commissions to build prisons or execution chambers to engaging in socially activist and sustainable architecture."

In a following article entitled "Activist Design," the author speaks about how in the 70's "federal money flowed to affordable housing and community design centers (CDC's)" that "helped low-income residents influence planning in their own neighborhoods" but that by the 80's Ronald Reagan had slashed funding for such things.

In a following article in RECORD entitled The Architect's Dilemma: When to Say No, the author writes about the penal system in our country holding some 80,000 prisoners in isolation, some for many years, equating that practice to cruel and unusual punishment. He wrote, "Following an earlier effort to persuade designers to refuse prison work altogether, Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility is now conducting a campaign to have the AIA revise its code of ethics to enjoin architects from designing spaces for the worst aspects of our penal system: execution chambers and solitary-confinement cells."

There are also references in the editorial and other articles referring to designing for climate change, sustainability and affordable housing.

I have been a member of the AIA for many years, and I served a three-year term on the state AIA board. I believe it is a great organization, but recently I have noticed a bent toward insertion of certain people's values into its Code of Ethics, an insertion that can potentially lead an architect to violate his or her own ethics based on their own beliefs.

In particular, this would include acceptance of including "sustainable" design in our member's practices.

The slippery slope exists, for example, in the strict definition of the word "sustainability." Do I believe that we should be good stewards of the resources we have been blessed with? You bet I do.

Do I believe that I must be "sustainable" because of man-made global warming? No. Absolutely not. The concept of man-caused global warming is based on junk science and politics, nothing more.

Do I believe that the Earth warms? Yes. Do I believe that the earth cools? Yes. It does so in concert with the cooling and warming of our sun. That is proven science.

The question is, am I in or out of compliance with the Code of Ethics? Or are my well-meaning colleagues, some of whom have received awards for their work, in or out of compliance with the Code when they design elaborate buildings that unnecessarily consume vast quantities of materials when a simple, minimal box design would use far less energy and resources. I'm not against their designs. Boxes are ugly, but that's just my opinion.

And let's be honest enough to eliminate euphemisms to disguise the real meaning of terms. For example, the term "affordable" has come to mean "subsidized by the taxpayers" and what that means is that government will take from you to give to someone else.

My ethics are based on my Christian beliefs and the Christian-Judeo culture that formed this nation and made it great. As such, what I see as ethical is bound in truth. If we believe that sustainability is important, and I do, then let's be honest about why. In fact, the way that the Code is written, it does not state the why, and that is as it should be.

But as they begin to entertain other causes to insert in that code - if they really are - it will not be long before we are being told what we can or cannot accept in our practices.

I would have no problem designing a prison with execution chambers or isolation cells but I would never design an abortion clinic or a mosque. I believe that abortion is a heinous, murderous act of paganism and barbarianism and I believe that Islam is likely the most destructive force on earth. At what point would I be forced to design what I don't believe in, and condemned for designing what I do believe in?

My hope is that the real purpose of these articles was to get architects to think more about their role in society, and to act more according to their own conscience, something in our society that is demonstrably lacking.



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