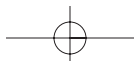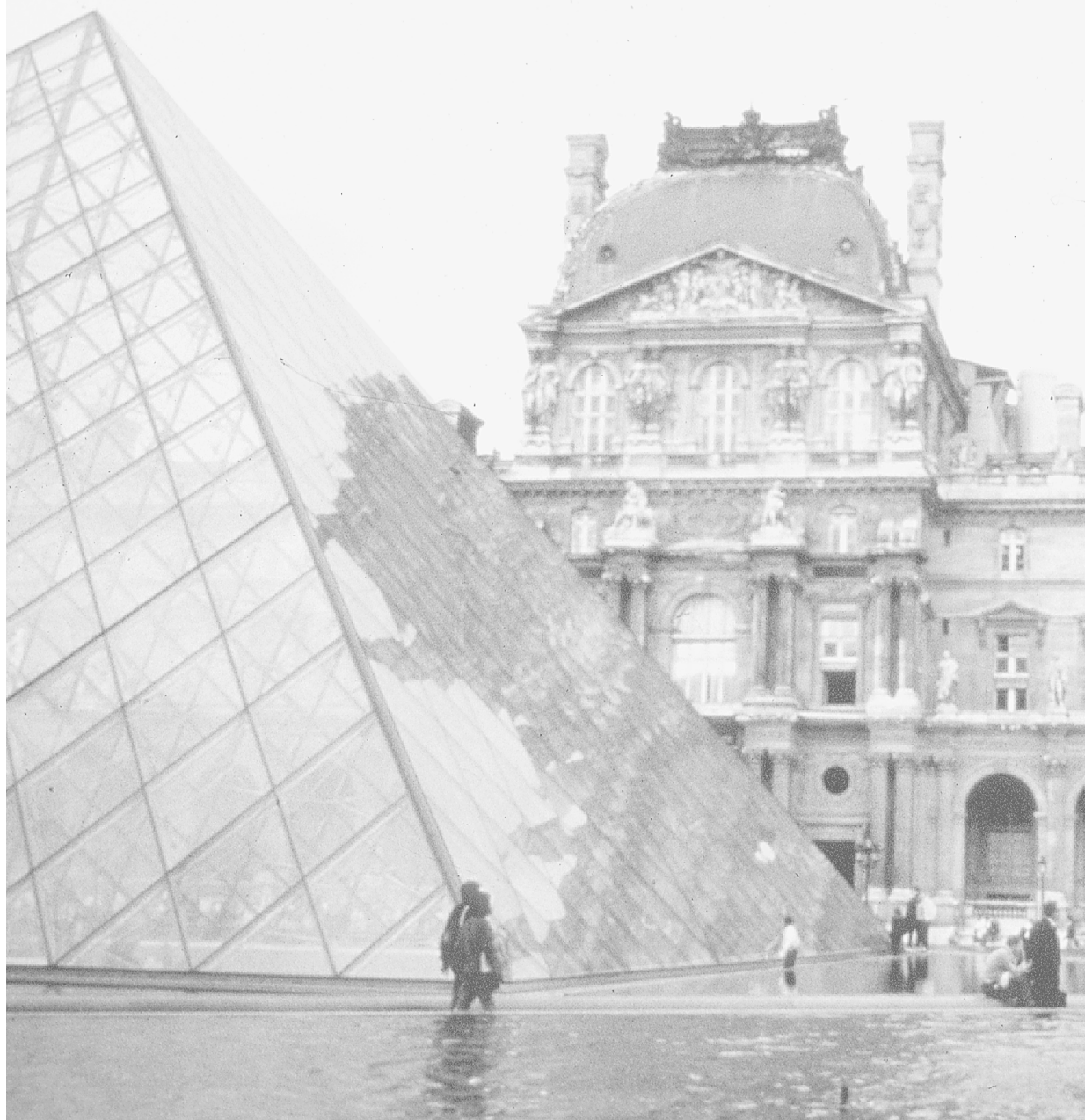# P A R T I

AWARENESS

INTRODUCTION TO AWARENESS

ENGAGING ETHICS AND ARCHITECTURE

Ethics and the Practice of Architecture is part of the growing body of studies identified as "applied ethics": explorations of the application of ethical moral concepts and reasoning to everyday concerns and choices we are called upon to make regarding everything from telling the truth, to concern for the environment, to how to die. In this book, we bring together theoretical and practical perspectives in the examination of architecture and its ethics. We describe basic ethical theories and outline a method for applying ethical reasoning to the consideration of architectural issues. Within that context, the objectives of Part I: Awareness can be directly stated: a) to introduce the manner in which architecture and ethics intersect; b) the manner in which architecture contains an ethics and special ethical demands; and c) frameworks for assessing and thinking through architectural ethical issues.

To do this, we briefly explore the nature of ethics in Some Basics About Ethics, and the nature of architecture in The Ethical Nature of Architecture. Our pictures of each are not complete, but they set essential definitions in place. The remaining four sections: A Look at Ethical Concepts; Businesses, Professions, and Ethical Obligations; Ethics and Architectural Practices; and Ethical Reasoning, are the centerpiece of Part I: Awareness. Through case-study examples in each section, we illustrate the manner in which ethics and architecture overlap and examine architecture as an inherently ethical pursuit. We end with the delineation of an approach to ethical reasoning as it applies to architecture.

ETHICS—The very word seems to demand being written in capital letters— often seem to loom "out there" as some great,

Source: Visual Resource Collection, Iowa State University

daunting, perhaps even arcane set of theoretical discussions about what is right and wrong, and how to be a good person, to do good deeds, or to accomplish good things in the world. This picture has come into being as philosophers of all points of view have attempted through rigorously argued texts to address how we act in the world, and to define the values and processes we use in deciding what it is we ought to do—particularly in circumstances in which other people are affected by our choices. The greater the effort to define ethical constructs in "pure" terms extracted from everyday realities, for example: trying to define "good" in some absolute way that would hold for all peoples at all times and in all places, the more abstruse and disconnected from everyday life the theoretical discussions of ethics seemed to become. "ETHICS," in this characterization of it as an abstract discipline, seems to not be very helpful with practical applications to such pressing and often-faced questions like: "Is it okay to tell a "white" lie to help a friend?" Or, "Is it okay to protect my person-al financial status at the expense of my business colleagues when making a business decision that is legal?"

Architecture—which in a manner similar to ethics begs at least to be capitalized if not written in capitals: "A"rchitecture—is also a discipline of great breadth and complexity with practical applications. Architecture comprises the physical buildings and landscape we have shaped to suit our inhabitation of earth, of

course, but it is also a profession, a theoretical study, and includes the processes of both designing and building our habitat. There is also the "beauty" factor: if a building is not aesthetically pleasing or of a certain status of importance, is it "A"rchitecture? While these questions are illumined in ongoing arguments among architecture students, educators, practitioners, and critics, the public says: "Design our school so we like the looks of it!"

While these characterizations of ethics and architecture may be extreme, there is an underlying truth to the condition that both ethics and architecture are expansive, complex disciplines with internally consistent histories, theories, languages, and modes of argument. They address certain engaging questions of major import that we face in our lives: "How do we determine what is right and wrong in order to guide our actions?" and "What should the design of the landscape and buildings that we will inhabit be?" The processes of designing and constructing our habitat, with the presumed intention of improving the quality of life, implicitly require a judgment of the "right" thing to do. It is in this manner that architecture and ethics are joined together, in which there is a special ethics implicit in architecture. This creates the obligation that we, as architectural students and professionals, examine those special ethics.

This book's exploration of *Ethics and the Practice of Architecture* takes place in a particular set of circumstances at the turn of the century. Our contemporary global society is characterized by economic and political interactions that have heightened our awareness of cultural diversity and identity. Advances in science, technology, and communication that greatly enhance the quality of our lives also seem to simultaneously destabilize our very personhood: we can be almost anywhere, anytime, with almost any self-created self-image, experiencing virtual worlds. Substantial imbalances exist from nation to nation, and global region to global region with respect to economics, health-care, education, food, and material and natural resources.

Within that context, during the past twenty years, there has been a resurgence of interest in ethics. Ethics provides a basis for considering personal, professional, and communal values with respect to moral questions. Indeed, ethics studies help us determine *if* a situation involves moral questions. Ethical reasoning informs the positions we hold, the choices we make, and the communal or legal policies we may enact as we negotiate the complex dilemmas we face. Ethics applied in everyday life assists in reasoning through, and making decisions about, such moral questions as environmental protection, helping the less fortunate, care for the elderly, euthanasia, genetic engineering, etc. More gener-

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ally, ethics is concerned with how to go about life, what it means to "live well," to accomplish "good" in the world, and to be "just" or "fair" in one's personal and professional life.

The operative conditions of the contemporary global community and communication media outlined here combine to create a fluidity to the circumstances of life, including the "place-based" world of architecture. It seems to put the traditional role and ethics of architecture as a social construction at risk. Yet, countering that fluidity, the everyday world that we construct, inhabit, and experience is a physical reality. It is anchored in particular places and originates at particular points in time. This designed, built, and inhabited landscape is given form and rendered meaningful. The following three contemporary observations point to the essential character of architecture's enduring presence, and its ethical force:

> The essence of architecture lies not in its *usefulness*—the purely practical solutions it offers to the human need of shelter—but in the way it meets the much profounder spiritual need to *shape our habitat*. In our culture, architecture transcends the mere physical substance of buildings by endowing constructed forms with aesthetic, emotional and symbolic meanings which elevate them to symbols of civilisation.[1]

> A work of architecture is an image, a symbolic expression of the limitations, tensions, hopes and expectations of a community. I also believe that architecture is an ethical discipline before it is an aesthetic one.... This moral dimension is legitimized when architecture is presented . . . as something concrete and practical which each individual citizen . . . can relate to in a practical way.[2]

> When we build, we have not just a responsibility to ourselves and our clients, but to those who came before and those who will come after.... architecture transcends local issues. Questions of space, light and material, what makes a great building, are separate from client and site. Yet they are realized in a specific way, according to a genius loci.[3]

Collectively these three references open up several lines of thought about the ethical dimensions of architecture. **They are clear statements of architecture's most basic and most clearly understood purposes: that architecture is about shaping our physical habitat to suit human purposes, and in doing so also has the capacity to fulfill spiritual and emotional needs.** In these quotes, there is not only a recognition that architecture embodies the values of society that gives rise to it, but there is also clearly an acknowledged duty toward the future: that aspirations can be realized through works of architecture.

Each of these lines of thought is open to articulation and critique; they demand expansion to be more fully understood. To them can be added the themes of the processes of designing and building, the activities of architecture as a discipline and a profession, and the requisite knowledge and role of the architect, each of which has ethical dimensions.

These themes of personal and professional action, of architecture as object and place, as process and practice, together with its ethical content, are central to our explorations in *Ethics and the Practice of Architecture.* They will be further developed in a series of increasingly critical and probing discussions in Part I: Awareness.

THE EVENT THAT IS ARCHITECTURE

Architecture is a social-political-economic-cultural enterprise. It is not a solitary process; it includes whole communities of people committed to conceiving, designing, and constructing our habitat. It is supported by concepts and practical knowledge of technology, history, theory, cultural heritage, and dreams for the future. The processes of design and construction, and the places constructed both manifest and embody our culture. Designing our habitat is a specially informed process, a practice, or rather, a collection of practices.

Relationships

The practices of architecture include interactions among architects and: clients, building users, contractors, material suppliers, the general public, consultants, partners and staff, and other collaborating designers, such as landscape architects and interior designers. Some of those relationships are formalized through contracts (e.g., those with clients or consultants); others are formalized through governmental regulation or law (regulations regarding public hearings, code enforcement, and professional licensing, for example); and others are contingent or informal extrapolations of the formal ones (relations with building users, material suppliers, construction workers, and the general public).

Special Knowledge

In addition, there is the expectation that architects master and keep current in the core knowledge and skills of the discipline. They have a specific professional duty to possess and exercise competent expertise for the particular architectural projects in

which they may be engaged. Does the architect have the building-type expertise to pursue it? The professional expertise from programming to construction administration, from cost estimating to technical specification? Is the capacity to design for functional adequacy, and health and safety, as well as aesthetic quality available? What capabilities with respect to giving form to architectural works have been established? Has a team been assembled that has the full range of requisite competencies for the project?

Architectural Processes

A third area of practices is mastery of architectural processes. How are design processes carried out? What methodologies are used and what ideas inform designing? Who is involved, and how are decisions made? How are teaching and mentoring future architects carried out? What are the procedures by which architects engage the construction process? What are the mechanisms through which research that informs the discipline is pursued? These practices are not linked to particular settings—traditional private offices, academia, or government agencies, for instance—because they encompass practices that pertain to architects and architecture more generally, regardless of setting.

Additional sources of ethical obligations originate in the processes of participation in community affairs with respect to such things as the design of the environment, the provision of *pro bono* services to those in need, and service contribution to the profession itself.

These three fundamental notions:

- Formal and informal engagements and relationships among architects and others;
- The mastery of architectural knowledge and skills, and the competent exercise of professional knowledge and judgment including formgiving; and
- The conduct of architectural and related processes, from research and teaching, to design and construction, to community involvement,

are the principal practices of architecture within which ethical obligations arise.

ETHICAL ISSUES EMBEDDED IN TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICES

Taking a look at typical private architectural practice—the place 80% of licensed architects work—is a good introduction to the

range of ethical issues embedded in architecture.[4] In this setting, one may experience a variety of roles from intern to principal. Daily endeavors and decisions are driven by:

- Business choices (marketing, deciding on which projects to undertake, which clients to work with, etc.);
- Design deliberations and critiques (function, aesthetics, concepts); budgets (durability of architecture, value for cost);
- Client and contractor interactions (honoring contracts, fairness, trust and advising clients);
- Contracts (equitable conditions, providing value for service fees, mutual respect, and duties);
- Public presentations (who has the right to know and be advised about projects; who has input to design); and
- Staff development and recognition, etc.

While these are discussed under the guises of business and professional practices, and debates over the classic Vitruvian design trilogy "firmness-commodity-delight," embedded within them are ethical questions. A sampling of these embedded ethical questions:

- What are the motives, values, and intentions of potential clients? Do we concur with their values?
- Who are the people who will be using the places we design? How are they served?
- Who and what are impacted by the project, and in what ways?
- What type of project is it? Is the project's purpose one that we could support?
- Do we honor contracts that we enter into? Are we fair toward contractors and consultants?
- Do we give proper credit to those whose talent and work efforts contribute to the work that is shaped?
- Do discussions of architectural aesthetics during design give rise to consideration of ethics? If so, in what manner?
- Do we advise our clients or simply honor their requests? Are "advising" and "guiding" clients professional "duties," or do architects merely "serve" clients?
- Are architects "professionals"? What is the definition of a "profession," and do members of a profession have special ethical duties?

Many of these questions are anticipated in the AIA's *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*, which includes five "Canons" or broad

The processes of designing and constructing our habitat, with the presumed intention of improving the quality of life, implicitly require a judgment of the "right" thing to do. It is in this manner that architecture and ethics are joined together.

principles of conduct: General Obligations, Obligations to the Public, Obligations to the Client, Obligations to the Profession, and Obligations to Colleagues.[5] We explore the *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* more fully in Part II: Understanding.

A brief case example may serve to indicate how some of these ethical concerns are embedded in practice:

WORK-ASSIGNMENT CASE

> A colleague of ours, a Jewish woman, requested that she not be assigned to a team that was designing a defense command center for Saudi Arabia. She had resolved in her mind that a military complex was all right to design for Saudi Arabia because Saudi Arabia is an ally of the U.S. and was not endangering Israel (whose sovereignty she felt strongly about). However, as a *woman,* she knew that even in her leadership role as a project architect she would not have been accepted as an equal by the Islamic community sponsoring the project and would not have been allowed to attend meetings, etc. After considering her position on these personal principled issues, and balancing the interests of the firm and the employee, she was assigned by her firm to another project.

This case history contains concerns that are ultimately ethical in nature. Specifically in this situation, a number of generic ethical questions emerge:

- **Project type:** How do you feel in general about military and defense complexes (or prisons, or other types of defense and police structures)? Would you design one?
- **Who the client is:** Would you work for a foreign government, even an American ally, if you held personal values that disagreed with its political, social, or religious position?
- **Religious and gender issues:** How do you feel about religious differences? Have you ever felt gender discrimination?
- **Duties to the firm:** What is your obligation within a firm to your colleagues and to the firm itself?

In what ways are these concerns special to architecture?

The concerns raised by the above example lead to similar more broadly based questions and issues regarding public policy and the communal benefits of architectural projects versus personal values. When we continue to examine the dilemma our colleague and the firm faced, a number of more broadly encompassing ethical questions faced in everyday architectural practice come to the fore:

- How does a firm decide which commissions, public or private, to accept? How are ethical aspects of the decision regarded and evaluated?
- Is a project's "type" or "purpose" inherently ethically good or questionable? One might think of socially redeeming projects as being housing for the homeless, temporary homes for disaster victims, or such communal institutions as schools, daycare centers, shelters for abused women and their children, or hospitals.
- How would one determine the ethical dimensions of the project type?
  - By the motives of the client?
  - By the number of people affected?
  - Whether or not the purpose was aspirational and liberating, versus restricting and controlling, in intent?
  - By its expected socially beneficial impact on its client users and the community?
  - By whether or not social conventions (and thus power or majority mores and conventions) are supported?
  - By whether or not ecological concerns are addressed?
  - By whether or not the project (e.g., a school or capitol building) may be designed to serve as a symbol for its use, thus contributing, literally, to "construction" of the culture that gave rise to the project?

Another ethical area alluded to at the end of our example is that of employee relationships in privately owned companies. The partners of the architectural firm in our example case decided that the project type, the client, the contract, and the fees were all in order, and were excited about the project. Given the size of the staff and the concerns "on principle" of the employee mentioned, the firm leadership exempted her from working on the project. This appears to be a very "fair" or "right" thing to have done. But what if many people in the firm objected to the project: some on the basis of the type of building, some because of their disagreements with Islamic belief, others because of gender issues, etc.?

- Being employed in a free market, having sought a position, and having been hired by this particular architectural firm, do employees have "rights" to choose which work they wish to perform based upon their own personal "principles"?
- What sorts of "rights" do employees have?
- What sorts of "duties" toward employees do firm principals have?

We have moved into the classic dilemmas of labor and business ethics, but they are central to the ethics of architectural practice as well.

These questions regarding project purposes, client and personal values, and diverse and multi-cultural perspectives may be uncomfortable questions to pursue in an architectural context. However, by viewing this one case and its aspects of practice, and seeing how many ethical choices are embedded in it, we can begin to arrive at a sense of the omnipresence of ethical choices in architectural practices.

ARRIVING AT ETHICS

One not only must be aware of the embedment of ethics in architecture, one also must develop an awareness of both the range and limits of choice available in dealing with ethical issues. In typical practice situations, which revolve around architectural-design questions, project services, and personal and professional judgments, we discern not only that there is a question of choice, but that the choice may be judged to be strongly ethical in nature. For example:

- Is it ethically *"right"* or *"wrong"* to design a building that is extremely energy inefficient?
- Is the choice of building materials consistent with sustainable design principles? Do you think they ought to be?
- Is it somehow ethically *"good"* or *"bad"* (or at least relatively *more* "good" or "bad" in a given situation) to sacrifice certain functional efficiencies in pursuit of enhanced aesthetic character in a design?
- Are the planning and design of a progressive housing complex mixed with community services that will require the displacement and relocation of families and the demolition of an economically depressed neighborhood *"just and fair"* toward the families that will be displaced?

In considering "right from wrong," "good and bad," and "justness and fairness" with respect to what we "ought to do," we are raising several of the primary questions of ethics.

In considering and choosing our course of action, we may sense that we are personally exercising our professional knowledge skill and judgment well, that is, in a manner of excellence toward positive ends. Excellence of this type—in this case, bringing professional knowledge, judgment, and fairness to bear on

everyday environmental concerns in the conduct of architectural practices—is identified by ethicists as *virtue*.

An encompassing condition that affects ethical action is the fact that we are not only within the ethical situation with its primary questions, but also within a cultural milieu that has an impact on our perception of that situation. Living in the Western cultural tradition, in post-Enlightenment, post-Modern times, and being self-consciously aware of the questions raised are the prime instances of that conditioned perception. It is only because we are in this context that we even raise these questions. This encompassing condition is the context from which we inquire: "What should I do, personally and/or professionally as an architect, in this situation?"

The primary questions surrounding ethical choices and the context within which we consider those choices raise some additional basic questions:

- Where do concepts like "good," "the right thing to do," and "virtue or excellence" with respect to architecture arise from?
- Do they have opposites that complete a pair: "evil," "wrong," and "counterfeit or sham," respectively?
- Are they universal, that is, shared by all people? Or are they "relative," that is, relative to a particular time and place, and/or culture and community?
- Are they "real," that is, objectively real, or are they purely "subjective" mental constructs and thus fictive—whether anchored in religion, myth, legend, ritual, local laws, or common practice—even if they seem real?

The field of *meta*-ethics comprises defining and exploring these kinds of questions. They are the "questions beyond the questions" that try to get at the foundations of ethical thought and action.

Without an understanding of primary ethical questions and some understanding of the importance of these *meta*-questions, one will find it difficult to arrive at a firm basis for ethical discussion, choice, decision, and action. Introducing these concerns is the objective of Part I: Awareness.

THE ORGANIZATION AND FOCUS OF PART I: AWARENESS

What are the range of ethical issues faced in architecture? How can they be addressed? Are there processes for considering and

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making ethical decisions in architecture? Providing approaches to considering and resolving these questions is the intent of *Ethics and the Practice of Architecture*. The various discussions in Part I: Awareness introduce: 1) a basic definition of ethics; 2) the ethical nature of architecture; 3) several main concepts of ethics and ethical theories; 4) the ethics of business and the professions; 5) ethics and the practices of architecture; and 6) ethical reasoning.

The principal topics of ethics, architectural ethics, and ethical reasoning are presented several times in repetitive rounds, each time with increasing depth and complexity. For example, The Main Concepts of Ethics, which uses several architectural examples to illustrate basic ethical theories, builds upon On What Constitutes Ethics. Ethical Reasoning, which explores a single architectural case example from several perspectives, builds upon these two earlier sections. In a second example, a basic definition of architecture and architectural ethics is introduced in The Ethical Nature of Architecture. Building upon this discussion, Businesses, Professions, and Ethical Obligations extends the definition of architecture as a profession and clarifies professional duties. Ethics and Architectural Practices then explores several framing lenses through which the ethics of the architectural profession and architectural work can be examined.

Each iteration of discussion leads to a deepening understanding of architectural ethics. In this way, the discussion of general ethics and architectural ethics reinforce one another. Collectively, the sections provide a basic conceptual background and tools with which to consider ethical questions related to the practices of architects. They set the stage for more detailed analysis in Part II: Understanding and application in Part III: Choices.

SOME BASICS ABOUT ETHICS

INITIAL COMMENTS ON THE NATURE OF ETHICS

In the Introduction to Part I: Awareness, we touched upon the ethical nature of architecture and certain types of ethical questions, but we left the nature of ethics undefined. How do we trace the *intuitively ethical* in architecture back to *ethics* in order to better understand and assess architectural ethical dilemmas?

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that addresses the matters of how we ought to act and how we ought to conduct our lives in a way consistent with virtue and goodness. Around 400 BC, Plato