

Original Research Article

Architecture as Absolute: Reviewing Aristotle's Metaphysics of Architecture

Seyed Musa Dibadj*

Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran, Iran.

Received: 22/10/2022 ;

accepted: 25/01/2024 ;

available online: 20/04/2024

Abstract

Problem statement: Research on "philosophy of architecture," if the exact meaning of the word is considered, begins with studying the opinions in philosophy regarding architecture. Among a few philosophers who have spoken about architecture, whether it is a science or an art, Aristotle, with his pure and original thoughts, is truly in a high position. In the philosopher's opinion, architecture is defined by its foundation. For him, the foundation of the building is considered the origin of its existence. Architecture is not defined by the existence of accidents and the issue of the phenomenon, but contrary to the opinions of experts of the modern period, known in return for its foundation and not through the recognition of complications and human states that appear through living architectural spaces. In this way, the architectural effect is not recognized merely within the scope of a transverse or phenomenal situation. The concern of an architect is not to build endless phenomenal things along with the house but to build something that is essential in the end and is even ultimately independent of the architect himself. In a word, the house is for the house itself and not for anything else.

Research objective: The research objective is to investigate the Aristotelian view of architecture and to know the ontology of architectural construction.

Conclusion: In this research, the Aristotelian view of architecture is introduced from the perspective and origin of the theory of "architecture in an absolute way," i.e., an architecture that is in accordance with the philosopher's ruling and the ontological possibility of architectural construction and is discussed in defense of it. Some constructive considerations in the theory with the help of the Aristotelian plan have been discovered and explained.

Keywords: Aristotle's theory of architecture, Pure architecture absolute architecture, Principles of architecture, Philosophy of architecture.

Introduction

What is more important for the theory of architecture when Aristotle takes the example of architecture in explaining the origin or the

*Corresponding Author:dibaji@ut.ac.ir, 09352616150

ontological principle? Indeed, architecture, either as a science or as an art needs to be explained both in its origin and principle so that it can find a way to philosophy and make its unique place recognized. Nothing is more

important than how the origin of architecture is defined by referring to the foundation of the building. The origin (*arkhè*) in Aristotle's metaphysics is said to be that aspect of something that, as a result of the presence of that thing, something else first emerges; like the bottom of a boat, or the foundation of a building in a house, or in the example of animal beings, according to some, the heart, according to others, the brain is something accidental as they think. It is called the origin (Ross, 1928, Book V, 1013b). Therefore, architecture and ontology have a corresponding and interactive link in metaphysics. According to Aristotle, since being has levels in an absolute way, and existence refers to many levels and classes, and one of those levels is called accidental being, we should research such accidental beings. However, none of the common human knowledge has addressed the issue of transverse existence and architecture reveals no exception. For example, architecture does not research what happens to the users of a house - for example, whether living in that house will be difficult and painful for them or whether it will be peaceful and pleasant. Just like the art of weaving or shoemaking or cooking does not deal with the issue of accidental being (ibid., 1928, Book XI). In today's era, it seems that architects only try to achieve the desirability of the built work in concert with the favorable perception of the users of the constructions. As we know, this claim of Aristotle does not go together with the task of many sciences, including the modern knowledge of architecture, which is based on the productivity of the consumer's enjoyment, and philosophy in general does not correspond to the tasks of this knowledge. Contrary to Aristotle's idea, in the modern art and knowledge of architecture, necessary in the first stage is to recognize human complications and conditions. Architectural spaces and built phenomena are part of modern architecture, while essential and

ontological subjects are not concerned with the architect's business.

Statement of the Problem

Of course, if we need to know the complications and states of the phenomena in architecture, that does not mean that the architect or the creator of the architectural work can have all the lateral matters that appear in an architectural work, such as a house, under the command of his will or knowledge. The man who creates the architectural work is not the creator of a transit accident that is surrounded by all its effects and complications. For example, the amount of air in a room for breathing is not something an architect can ignore, but determining the amount of this air is not his first desire when building a room. Air is not a creation of the architect, and it is the conditions, materials, and other non-architectural matters that determine the limits and amount of air needed. Aristotle refers to these self-evident things in architecture, and the greatness of a philosopher is to discover such self-evident things in various sciences. There are also axioms in architectural knowledge. He states that the builder of a house does not build all the accidental things built with the house because these transformations are endless. Nothing prevents us from considering that the house is also useful for some and still shows that it is different from all other creatures. Obviously, the art of architecture is not the creator of any of these (that is, such symbols or a symbol). Just as the geometer also does not investigate the specific accidental symptoms of geometry, i.e., its shapes, whether, for example, a triangle other than a triangle with two right angles might exist or not. Apparently, this is in harmony with the rational method because the accident is just a kind of name (ibid., Book VI, Chapter II). It is as if the duty of the architect is not to enter into accidental symptoms and phenomena, as Aristotle says. With this definition, one should

doubt the work of architects such as Gaudí Catalani, who believe that the task of an architect is to create volumetric forms based on geometric shapes. These architects, as a whole, consider searching for this accidental symbol not only important but also the main task of architecture. It seems interesting to know, according to Aristotle's definition of science and Aristotle's assumption of architecture, what will be the rank of the works of such great architects? Is this the beginning of a historical gap between the theory of architecture on the one hand and the practice of architecture as it occurs in buildings and works and the general architects engaged in it or not?

In the explanation of the principle in architecture, on the one hand, according to Aristotle, power or ability (*dunamis*) means the origin (beginning) of movement or change in another thing or in the same thing to the credit of another thing. For example, the art of architecture (or house building) is a capability or power that does not exist in a built house. Unlike medical technology, which is an ability that can be present in a treated person but not in the sense that he finally has been treated (for example, a treated person who is a doctor himself), in general, the origin of movement and transformation in one another or in the same thing to the credit of another is called power or capability (*ibid.*, Book V, Chapter XII). This statement of Aristotle emphasizes a classical belief that asserts the independence of architectural art from the architectural work or product. A house is a house for itself. In simpler terms, the house is one thing, and the power or ability to create art is another thing that does not return to the house itself. The house was built for being, and the fact that it has become a house for me and you does not mean that it has made its own house. This truth is obvious and, at the same time, important. No one has yet been able to present such an idea about architecture. The vitality of such a belief is

that architecture is the knowledge of the form of the house or other architectural phenomena, and the matter of settling down, which the German philosopher Heidegger describes in detail in his famous article, is secondary to architecture, the house, and other things (Heidegger, 2004). We have also used the same clause in the definition of architectural knowledge and art. The knowledge of architecture may be considered the knowledge of the form of space or residential construction, and the art of architecture more than anything else is the art of creating these built spaces (see Dibadj, 2019). Building, or so-called (*bauen*), is related to such built form, although it is distinct from it in meaning. The realization of human goals in taking shelter in the house, although impossible without the act of architecture, is not involved in the definition of architectural knowledge in the sense that architecture is the art of realizing residential space. In simple words, after being built, the house is occupied by humans, and through this occupation, the human being can find a place and a home. Simply put, the house is no longer built and is waiting for anyone; it is the man who is waiting for the completion of the house. Using the art of architecture, apart from the act of building, a house is also created. Aristotle gives an example of the description of architecture in contrast to the description of view. Look in "seeing"; you cannot see anything other than seeing. Of course, this is not the case in architecture because apart from building, a house is created. Application in the act of seeing is the first purpose, and in the case of architecture, the intention lies in the result of architecture rather than just the act of architecture. As the act of building a house appears through the development of a house or building a house, it appears and exists at the same time as the "house". Needless to say, in cases where the created object is something other than a faculty exercise, there is actuality in the created thing. For example, building a

built thing and weaving a woven thing, and so on ([Ross, Book IX, Chapter VIII](#)). In addition to all the causes that are called special kinds of essential and, in other instances, accidental properties, let's also say some causes are called potential and some actual causes; as in house building, an architect who is building a house is the actual cause of the house ([ibid., Book V, Chapter II, 1014b](#)). In this story, the student of architecture who studies it or the architect who has not yet succeeded in building a house is known as a potential architect.

There is only one ability for interaction. (Because something is an “ability” that either has the ability of passivity or makes something else passive by using itself). However, in a way, abilities are of another kind since there is a type of ability that is passive in the object (because it has a beginning source and also because the substance matter is also a source), it accepts passive inactivity; that is, something is changed by something else. For example, what is oily is inflammable, and that object that imparts strength in some way is breakable, as such in other cases, and the other type of ability is in the active object, like heat and technology (heat in the heater and technology in the architect) ([ibid., Book IX, Chapter I, 1046a](#)). In natural things, the driving cause, for example, that man begets is man, and in cases that are born of thinking, the driving cause is form or the opposite of it. Therefore, in one way, the causes can be triple, and in another, they can be four. Therefore, in architecture, you can find four types of cause, i.e., material cause, formal cause, active cause, and final cause, which Aristotle distinguished from each other ([ibid., Book XII, Chapter IV, 1070b](#)).

In Aristotle's view, the actual architect was considered the cause of the house, and actuality is before concept, and the result is clear: the actual architect is before the theoretical one. The reason is that “capable” in its first meaning is to be able to actualize. He says I call someone

an architect (house builder) who can build a house, or I call someone an observer who can see, and spectacle is something which can be seen. The same is true in other cases as well. In this way, the concept and recognition of actuality necessarily precede the recognition of capability ([ibid., Book IX, Chapter VII](#)). These two fundamental issues complement each other. That is, on the one hand, the cause of the architect's house is actual, and on the other hand, the actuality of the work, and in this area of our discussion, the actuality of the house conceptually precedes everything. That is, until the house is built, it cannot be said that there was an architect. It means that someone who knows architecture but still does not have it is not recognized as an architect in existence. This last point is the main point that we started talking about while using the language or the argument of Aristotle, which is so important beyond other principles. The result will naturally be that the actuality of a house or any other architectural work will have more originality and consistency than the ability of the builder of the house or any other work. In other words, the thing built and realized is like a house or even a room, which is the meaning of architecture and what makes an architect an architect. As a result, the boundaries of architecture lie in the construction, and the limits of the house lie in the built space. Regarding the architect's ability, Aristotle has explained it in detail. There are those like Megarians who argue, “A thing is capable only when it is active, and it is not capable when it is not active; for example, someone who is not building a house is not capable of building a house, but only someone who is building a house. He is capable as long as he builds a house, and similarly in other cases. It is not difficult to see the results of this statement. It is obvious that someone will not be a builder until he builds a house (because being a builder means being able to build a house, that is, his ability

is compatible with his architectural practice and it is necessary, and if there is no opportunity for architectural practice, there will not be an opportunity for an architect and not be revealed also any construction at all.), and similarly about other arts or professions. It is not possible for a human being to have such arts without having learned and understood them at some point, or to have them without having lost them at some point (either as a result of forgetting or following a disaster or over time, but not as a result of an annihilation object because this object always exists). Isn't it the result of the words of the Magarian¹ that whenever someone stops building a house, he no longer has the art of architecture? If he had not started working again and built a house, would he have achieved this art? How would this be possible? (*ibid., Book IX, Chapter III, 1047b*).

Actually, every part of human effort may be actual and sometimes not; for example, "buildable" in the sense that it is buildable (which is merely a concept) and the actuality of "buildable" in the sense that it is buildable. The construction of buildings and such components of buildings and houses, such as columns, roofs, terraces, etc., is to build something because the actuality is with this mansion and house, that is, the actuality of building a house is with the actuality of the house. The result is that as long as the architect, the builder, and the worker are engaged in the construction work, there is no house or mansion yet, and when the house exists, it will no longer be "buildable" because "buildable" is what is in the process of being built. At this important moment, Heidegger's theory of architecture surrenders to Aristotle's theory of architecture because, basically, building a house is inevitably a house that can be finished with actuality, a house that makes it possible to live. But the act of building or bauen that Heidegger emphasizes is a kind of movement that is still just an act without considering the actuality of the house

(see Ross, *Book XI, Chapter IX, 1066b*). The same reason is true for other kinds of artistic endeavors. For example, until the fifth symphony note is not realized, the title of the fifth symphony piece of music cannot be given to it, and when the note is considered in the context of its performance, the unfinished movement of the actuality and the merit of the finished form of the work of art have not yet been completed. On the other hand, since the fifth symphony piece was played and finished, there is no longer the actual performance of that piece, and the work of the musician and the musicians, i.e., playing, and so to speak, everything in the scene became over. Heidegger has no choice but to surrender to Aristotle. It means that as long as the architect is still at work, the house is not ready to live in, and when the house was built, it became possible to live in. There is no longer a time for architects or their construction. Therefore, bauen does not correspond and is related to real architecture to dwellen, and they have no relationship with each other in practice, and the relationship between these two is inherently disconnected and impossible.

The basic explanation of Aristotle's opinion is that it was said in the discourses about the essence that every future phenomenon (to gignomenon) is something that emerges from something and through something, and this created being is in terms of the same type of being as the creator. For this reason, it is believed that it is impossible to be a builder who has never built a house or to be a harpist who has never played the harp. This is where the fallacy of the sophists emerged: the learner of something does not yet possess it (*ibid., Book IX, Chapter VIII*). Therefore, since the architect has not yet built a house and the house has not built itself, he is not yet an architect. He does it like someone who does not have knowledge, whose subject is knowledge. We may note that according to Aristotle, substances are threefold: one is matter,

the second is nature, and the third substance is a combination of both of them, which are indeed single things, like Socrates or Callias. Now, in some cases, “this thing” does not exist beside or apart from the compound essence. Take House as an example. If there is no art (architecture) to give the house the appearance of a house, it will not be a house, because a house without a form has no meaning (that is, only matter). Or the material of the house, which is stone, cement, and iron, will not have the form and meaning of a house and will not be a house. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is material in the house that is separate from the substance of the form or nature of the house. The emergence and decay of forms in architectural phenomena is special, and its interpretation and explanation help to understand the taking in of objects and other cases. When can we say that “house” and “health” are without substance or not? We may say “is” or “isn’t” something that emerges as a result of the art industry (*ibid., Book XII, Chapter III*). The question of the existence or non-existence of a house or mansion is very important and should be given in detail in its place, and in this paper, it should be said that the origin of the distinction between the existence and the essence is briefly stated in the text of Aristotle’s metaphysics, and Islamic philosophers, especially Ibn Sina, have accompanied Aristotle and elaborated and interpreted this fundamental duality. Here too, the importance of architecture appears in the development of ontology. The dignity of a building or a house related to essentials is different from the existential dignity of a building or a house. We postpone the detailed interpretation of this meaning to another day.

In addition, things are together according to the place found as primary (or near a place), and things are “separate,” which are in other places that are not primary. They are “tangential” things whose end borders are the same. The “intermediate” is that which the changing thing

naturally reaches sooner; if this changing thing changes continuously according to its nature, then the last border. “The opposite in terms of location” is that which is the farthest in a straight line. A “subsequent” is that which is after the beginning (whether it is defined in terms of form or otherwise), and there is no “intermediate” of the same genus to which the subsequent belongs, such as lines successive lines, units successive units, or houses successive houses. Nothing prevents something (of another kind) from being intermediate. Because what follows comes after something, and something is late (*ibid., Book XI, Chapter XII, 1068b*). Also, since something that is without matter appears from something that has matter, it can be said that the architect did not make the material of the house but gave that material a special form. For this reason, medical technology and architectural art are forms of health and home (*ibid., Book VII, Chapter VII, 1032b*). Some say in the definition of “what is a house” that the house is the same as stones, bricks, and wood. This group talks about the “potential” house. Because those things—stones, bricks, and wood—matter. But those who call the house a container and the form or capture covering objects and bodies, or add something else like that, are talking about its actuality. Aristotle, in a phrase in metaphysics, says that there is another way to define the house. Some combine both definitions; they speak of a third thing, which is the same substance that is composed of them (that is, of matter and form) because the compound substance is related to the sum of both (*ibid., Book VIII, Chapter II, 1043b*).

It should not be neglected that sometimes it remains hidden whether a name indicates a compound substance (sunthéton ouian) or actuality and form. For example, is “house” a common sign for a shelter made of bricks and stones that are placed in such and such a way, or for the actuality and form that is the

same shelter? (*ibid.*, Book VIII, Chapter III) Also, what prevents something from moving or acting according to its own motivation and desire, we call it “has.” For example, we say that the columns “hold” the loads that press on them; or, as the poets make Atlas the “keeper” of the sky, it would fall to the ground; as some naturalists also say, this means that the “holding together” (to sunekhon) is said to have things together; otherwise, it is as if each of them, according to his own motivation, becomes separated. But “being in something” is also spoken in the same way, with the meaning of “having” (*ibid.*, Book V, Chapter XXIII).

After the preliminaries and these analytical searches, it now appears that the house is not created simply of bricks and their combinations, as “syllable” is not created of letters and combinations, and this is true because combination and mixing are not those things that make combination and mixing from them (*ibid.*, Book VIII, Chapter III, 1043b). Aristotle considers architecture as poetry in creating a single composition. Another type emerges from the combination of matter and form, as the parts of the whole and the verse of the poem are from the Iliad, and the house is made of stone. In such phenomena, the form (morphe) is the goal or end, and it is complete when the goal is reached (*ibid.*, Book V, Chapter XXIV). This is the way I consider it in the article form of construction and deconstructing” as the basis of the definition of architecture and the basis of the fundamental division for all types of architecture, and the definition of architecture depends on. The exact definition of architecture is based on an understanding of this concept. Le Corbusier was right to say that our eyes are made to see forms in the light, and therefore, against Heidegger’s opinion, it is the making and making of the forms that inhabiting becomes possible as a result of it and after it, and contrary to what commentators and promoters of philosophy trust in Heidegger’s

popular interpretation of architecture, this characteristic of “dwelling” should not be considered as having the same value and validity as “building” and “unbuilding.”

Conclusion

It can be concluded that as long as the architect, the builder, and the worker are engaged in the construction work, there is no house or mansion yet, and when the house exists, it will no longer be “buildable”, because “buildable” is what is in the process of being built. At this important moment, Heidegger’s theory of architecture should itself surrender to Aristotle’s theory of architecture because building a house is inevitably finished with the actuality of a house, a house that makes it possible to inhabit, but the act of building or bauen that Heidegger emphasizes is a kind of movement that is still just an action without considering the actuality [the actuality of the house] (see Ross, 1928, Book XI, Chapter IX, 1066b). Heidegger has no choice but to surrender to Aristotle. It means that as long as the architect is still at work, the house is not ready to live in, and when the house was built, it became possible to live in it. Therefore, bauen does not correspond and is not related to dwellen, and these two have no relationship with each other in practice, and the relationship between these two is inherently disconnected and impossible.

Endnotes

1. It refers to the philosophers of the Megara school (Megara) from the Socratic schools. Its founder was Euclid, or, in our language, Euclidès, a follower of Socrates. These philosophers are also called “dialecticians,” and they influenced Aristotle’s logical theories. See From Socrates to Aristotle, 2nd ed., p. 74–73.

References list

- Aristotle. (1910). *De generatione animalium* [On the generation of animals] (A. Plattr, Trans.). Clarendon Press. [in english]
- Aristotle. (1998). *Metaphysics* (Sh. Khorasani, Trans.). Hikmat Publications. [in persian]
- Aristotle. (2021). *In the Sky*(I. Saadat, Trans.). Hermes. [in persian]
- Dibadj, S. M. (2019). *The Nature of Architecture*. Cultural Research Office.

- Heidegger, M. (2004). *Bauen Wohnen Denken*. Virträge und Aafsätze.
- Hesiod. (2019). *Theogony* (F. Farnoudfar, Trans.). Tehran University Press. [in persian]
- Khorasani, Sh. (2013). *From Socrates to Aristotle*. Shahid Beheshti University Press.
- Ross, W.D. (ed.) (1928). *The Works of Aristotle, vol. Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press.
- Schlegel Catherine, M. & Weinfield, H. (2006). *Theogony and Works and Days*. Ann Arbor.

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Dibadj, S.M. (2024). Architecture as Absolute: Reviewing Aristotle's Metaphysics of Architecture. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 21(131), 53-60.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2024.366819.5278
URL: https://www.bagh-sj.com/article_192249.html?lang=en

