



*The Morality of Urban Mobility*. Shane Epting, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2021, xii + 173pp. \$105 Hdk, \$45 Ebook, ISBN: 9781786608192

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For some, the question “What is a transport system?” might warrant a technical description of complex technological networks that enable our movement within the city. However, if in addition to a technical approach to the question, we are also offered a reflection about the economic, social, ethical, and political aspect of its effects, we gain a richer understanding of what a “transport system” really is within human culture and its development. Shane Epting’s monographic book *The Morality of Urban Mobility* invites us to do just that by considering our transport systems through a moral lens and reclaiming philosophy as an active tool to rethink and transform our experience of mobility within the city.

The book’s foreword, written by Lewis R. Gordon, stresses the urgency of dealing with these topics, particularly while considering the requirements of a healthy and thriving democracy. Gordon reminds the reader of philosophy’s roots in the city, and how this space was the stage and inspiration for Ancient Greek philosophers’ contemplation. Epting’s work demonstrates philosophy’s continuing relevance to urban topics, and that thinking about our movement within the city can be insightful when seen as a feature of our political agency.

Epting’s work argues in favor of an interdisciplinary effort to change the fabric of our urban environment. Because of this approach, the book would be useful not only to academic philosophers and students but also to transportation professionals and people engaged in transport and urban activism. Epting’s text engages with the work of philosophers—from different parts of the world and different eras—as well as the efforts made in different disciplines that underscore the need for different approaches and tools to think and transform our urban environment.

To convey the importance of urban mobility and philosophy’s relevance to it, Epting presents the latter as a tool—“well-ordered reason” (1)—that can help us navigate the intricacies of life in the city. In this case, philosophy’s purpose is not merely to understand the city, but to *change* how we move through it. To do so, Epting proposes a horizon: transportation justice. To achieve it, interdisciplinary effort is needed where philosophy’s contribution lies in providing the method of “moral ordering” proposed by the author. Such an endeavor would help navigate



the complexities of transportation demands in the city by presenting a suggestive prioritization between different stakeholders.

The structure of the book mirrors the method Epting proposes to deal with transportation issues: mereology as both a method of thinking about the parts that make up transportation systems, and a way to treat each chapter like a part of the presented argument. Because of this, each of the ten chapters builds upon the previous chapters to convey how “moral ordering” could be of service. However, even with Epting’s emphasis on understanding the city’s transport system as divided in parts, his conclusion champions a holistic and dynamic view of said system and the elements that shape it. In the last chapters, the concepts of “respect”—taken from philosopher Antonio Caso—and “urban enlightenment”—rooted in Kant’s “enlightenment”—serve as the political element that would connect stakeholders and the transportation system in the process of moral ordering. In this sense, the notions of “parts” and “whole” are not in tension but in a constant dynamic movement in Epting’s work.

The first chapter, “The Road Ahead,” highlights the purpose, scope, and limits of the text. While doing so, it sets the stage for the discussion of “urban mobility” starting with how Epting defines it. It is important for the author to share this baseline with the reader since this topic will be dealt from historical, social, and ecological perspectives. Thus, for the reader, “urban mobility” will mean “what it means to move in the city” (1).

This chapter also showcases how philosophy will participate and enrich the interdisciplinary conversation of urban transportation systems. According to the author, it will bring about the possibility of viewing such topics from a moral and ethical perspective, bridging the gap between the abstract and concrete realities of the city. To do so, Epting proposes “moral ordering,” a flexible method that aims at transportation justice progress instead of “ideal” solutions that ignore the particularities of each city. Taking from Lewis R. Gordon’s concept of “disciplinary decadence,” this philosophic method—“anti-framework framework”—provides moral guidance to solve specific problems with enough conceptual flexibility that the process of addressing its particularity is not hindered by a theoretical structure (10).

With these characteristics, the conceptual device of “moral ordering” proposes a suggestive order between multiple and diverse stakeholders. Starting with the group that deserves prioritization in transport conversations: “vulnerable and marginalized populations” the order continues with “the public, nonhuman life, future humans, and anthropogenic ur-

ban artifacts” (9). As is stressed in different moments of the text—even with examples of situations where the order would be modified—this prioritization is not presented as universalizable.

As evidence of its mereological approach, the remaining nine chapters of the text can be divided into three blocks. Each of these blocks deals with the different parts of the arguments behind Epting’s proposed “moral ordering.” The first block conveys the context of the discussion: transportation systems through a moral lens. The second one, deals directly with moral ordering and its foundational arguments. The third block dives into the concepts that will inform moral ordering and co-planning initiatives.

In the first block (including the chapters two, three, and four, titled respectively “Moving and Thinking,” “Thinking, Moving, and Parts,” and “Moving, Parts, and Morality”), which references the work of Hans Jonas, the author places the conversation of transportation systems within the context of philosophy of technology. He presents the virtues and limits of Jonas’s work while highlighting his arguments for the importance of his interdisciplinary approach. With this view in mind, Epting presents mereology—the study of parthood—as a way of tackling a complex topic like urban transportation systems. Then, making a distinction between the passive and active parts of said system, Epting turns to the moral aspect of his work: the examination of urban transportation systems and their moral impact on the lives of those who utilize them.

This first block serves as a backdrop for Epting’s proposal, presented in the second block of the book made up of chapters five, six, and ten (“The Pathway to Moral Ordering,” “Moral Prioritization in Urban Mobility,” and “Thinking, Moving, and The Future”). In these chapters, Epting grapples with the moral problem of human’s relationship with the nonhuman world and the different approaches to this dichotomy in the history of philosophy such as anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Finding them inadequate to deal with transportation affairs, he champions “weak anthropocentrism” as a consistent approach that will assist the method of moral ordering while balancing the interests of human and nonhuman stakeholders in complicated urban affairs. Then, in the concluding chapter of the book, Epting shows his conceptual device with all its nuances and specifications at work to deal with the subject of automated vehicles. Instead of arguing against adding this new technology to a complex urban mobility network, the author invites the reader to consider them as another part in said system that should be evaluated through moral ordering.

Epting's method seeks to avoid errors of the past, in this case, thinking that automated vehicles will solve the ecologic, economic, and transportation problems of the city. Because the addition of this automated technology to the city streets has no precedent, Epting uses the case of Transportation Network Companies (such as Uber or Lyft) to convey how the predictions about its addition differed from the actual impact they have had on the urban landscape. Understanding the constantly changing nature of the city and its transportation system, Epting champions a "co-planned" future, where new additions, like automatic vehicles, can be considered through a participatory structure based on "respect" and "urban enlightenment."

In Epting's work, we can see how these last concepts—respect and urban enlightenment—function as the connection between passive and active parts of the urban environment in a dynamic and participatory totality. They are presented and analyzed in chapters seven, eight, and nine ("Love, Respect, and Urban Mobility," "Moving, Thinking, and Cooperating," and "Moral Ordering and Worthwhile Goals"). The concept of "respect"—proposed by Antonio Caso—serves as a mediator in the antagonistic relationship between the individual and the collective. Taking from this philosopher, Epting presents "respect" as a decision guide while considering transportation system plans and how they will impact the different urban stakeholders. In other words, the resolutions taken by city transportation officials must reflect their respect for its users. Because of this design threshold, the concept of respect also helps the method of moral ordering avoid any "urban relativism" (111) that might result from the flexibility of its "anti-framework framework." Epting uses thought experiments to argue that the concept of respect as a design and decision criteria would have as a result a transportation system that does not force itself on users but attracts them because it reflects their values and meets their needs.

The issue of urban relativism is also averted with Epting's proposal of "urban enlightenment." He defines it as a superior knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the city, including how its parts have moral and political impact on its more vulnerable communities (118). The concept encourages the city's residents and officials to step away from their particularities and consider the perspectives of other community members. In this sense, this concept also invites them to enter the terrain of the political. According to the author, this mutual acknowledgement will eliminate the tension between experts and non-experts in the process of co-planning a transportation initiative, leading the way to a true hori-

zontal approach that benefits from, both, the know-how of the experts and the input of participant experiences.

As mentioned earlier, Epting's work showcases thoroughly how philosophy can have an active and meaningful part of urban transformation processes. However, as with any complex topic, some questions are glossed over. When posing the issue of our cities and how they have been largely determined by economic considerations and not moral ones, the author does not dive into how this prioritization is incompatible with his proposed method. For example, in Chapter Eight, the author mentions Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey—both Marxist thinkers—while briefly presenting the idea of “Right to the City,” but he leaves out the economic and political arguments against the status quo that accompany their claim to reshape the city (110).

In this respect, Epting's method is not put into its political and economic context, where, contrary to moral ordering, it seems that our cities' development does not have “transportation justice” as a guiding vector. I think that highlighting this would have greatly benefitted his argument, as it would show how a transport system informed by co-planning practices and moral ordering would differ greatly from our lived reality.

In summary, Epstein's *The Morality of Urban Mobility* can help, not only to acknowledge how our lives and movement are determined by our built environment but by opening us to a richer, more connected political life in the city. The author's proposed conceptual method, “moral ordering,” could prove to be a useful tool, not only for philosophical engagement, but for applied efforts of transportation system development as well as the articulation of concrete claims in the context of urban activism. It also serves as proof that philosophy never left the city.

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