

Three Ways of Doing Philosophy of the City

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose to subdivide philosophy of the city into three more specific areas of study. First, philosophy of the city as urban epistemology and philosophy of the urban sciences focuses on problems of experiencing and knowing cities and of generating scientific knowledge about cities. Second, philosophy of the city as urban normative theory seeks to interpret and spell out the central categories of practical philosophy—the right, the good, the aesthetic, the democratic, etc.—for urban contexts. Third, applied philosophy of the city aims to combine philosophical analysis with the search for practical solutions and concrete possibilities for change. The benefit of such a subdivision of the field is twofold. On the one hand, this systematization clarifies the mutual relations between philosophy of the city, other branches of philosophy, and other urban sciences. On the other hand, it helps identify open questions and blind spots within the current debate and, thereby, open up new directions for future research in philosophy of the city.

Keywords: applied philosophy; philosophy of the urban sciences; right to the city; urban epistemology; urban normative theory

1. Introduction

In recent years, philosophy of the city has been established as an independent field of research. Nowadays, philosophy of the city has its own conferences and research groups, its first textbooks and handbooks. Starting with this inaugural issue, it has its own journal as well. Philosophy is gaining noticeable influence in the interdisciplinary study of cities.

Given this dynamic and much-welcomed development, the main aim of the present paper is to map the field in a systematic way. Reconsidering the current state of research, I will propose to subdivide philosophy of the city into three further contoured areas of study, philosophy of the city as urban epistemology and philosophy of the urban sciences (sect. 2); philosophy of the city as urban normative theory (sect. 3); and applied philosophy of the city (sect. 4).

There are two main reasons for such internal differentiation. First, a systematic map of the field helps us to better understand the connection and interdependencies between philosophy of the city, other branches and disciplines of philosophy, and other urban sciences, like urban sociology and urban anthropology. Second, such a map helps us to identify open research questions and unsolved problems. If both can be achieved, the proposed tripartite division will have fulfilled its main purpose.

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2. Urban Epistemology and Philosophy of the Urban Sciences

Philosophy of the city can focus on questions of concepts, experience, knowledge, and knowledge-generating methods. Contributions to *urban epistemology* analyze the basic conditions and structures of urban experience and city-related knowledge. The focus is on everyday experience and practical knowledge. By contrast, *philosophy of the urban sciences* deals with specific methodological problems connected to scientific investigations and analyses of cities, urban structures, and urban developments.

This first way of doing philosophy of the city is the one that has received the least attention so far. This is particularly true regarding basic epistemological questions. In the following, I will illustrate my claim by identifying four central problems that future philosophical research has to address within the fields of urban epistemology and philosophy of the urban sciences in a far more comprehensive way.

First, there are conceptual issues that need to be dealt with. Philosophers of action spend most of their time discussing the concept of an action. Philosophers of art have filled dozens of bookshelves with books that discuss the concept of art or an artwork. By comparison, discussions about the concept of a city do not play a major role in recent work in the field.¹ There might be two reasons for that: On the one hand, other disciplines like urban sociology and urban geography developed countless concepts and definitions of cities. I mention only a very famous one, given by the Chicago School Sociologist Louis Wirth, who defined the city as a “relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals” (Wirth 1938, 8). This definition is, of course, like any other conceivable definition, an invitation to dispute. On the other hand, the empirical phenomenon “city” might simply seem to be too diverse and multi-faceted to be reduced to a single concept.

Both reasons are comprehensible. However, they require at least a philosophical discussion on a meta-level. With regard to concepts and definitions developed in other disciplines (like Wirth’s proposal), one has to ask whether they can be used as starting points for asking *philosophical* instead of sociological or ethnological questions. The second point, cities empirically given variety, raises even bigger problems. Philosophers of the city often focus on specific cities when developing their ideas, theories, and proposals. As long as these conceptual issues are not addressed, it is not clear, whether philosophical insights developed with reference to a particular city *A* are transferable to all other cities, or only to those cities that are somehow comparable to *A*, with regard to, *e. g.*, size, density, or age. In other words, when we are doing philosophy of the city, it is in many cases not clear whether we are in fact doing philosophy of the city-as-such, philosophy of the metropolis, philosophy of the small city, philosophy of Rome, philosophy of city *A* and so on. Noll, Biehl, and Meagher are surely right in claiming that philosophy of the city is in a sense “once again back in Ancient Greece”, in need of critical reflection on the structure of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ settlements – and in need to “flesh out accurate conceptions of the city and/or aspects of urban life” (2020, 4).

¹ Of course, the concept of the city is discussed in the literature. My claim is that these discussions are for the most part surprisingly brief, sometimes fulfilled in the style of a rather compulsory task. For a (quite rare) exception and recent conceptual discussion, see Varzi (2019), who defends a process-oriented answer to the question: What is a city? Varzi’s study includes an informative list of metaphors that have been used within urban research to illuminate the concept of a city (*ibid.*, 401). See, as well, Meagher (2008, 5–8), who provides a readable overview of influential conceptions of the city as they have been developed throughout the history of philosophy.

Second, the crucial questions for urban epistemology are: What does it mean to know a city? And, how is this knowledge connected to personal experience? Recently, Quill R. Kukla has made a systematic proposal of what it means to know an urban place. In their view, place-knowledge is a type of aesthetic knowledge that is at the same time activity-oriented: “When we say we know a place, what we mean is that we know what it is like to *competently experience* it, through our recognition of its static and dynamic patterns, including its embodied social patterns or its place ballets. We mean that we can experientially grasp the place and orient our-selves in it—we *know our way around* it, and we *know what it is like to navigate* it.” (Kukla 2022, 5)

This promising account provokes further questions: Place knowledge, as Kukla emphasizes, is knowledge of a concrete individual. A city is made up of many, maybe even countless, places. If the city is only big enough, one might probably never get in touch with all its places. In consequence, is the claim justified that one never gets to know a city, but only some of its places? And, what about propositional knowledge? Won't we accept the claim that in order to know a city, one has to know at least some basic facts about its history, its traditions and cultural patterns? Furthermore, is there also a place for testimonial knowledge? Is it possible for me to know something about an urban area that I rarely visit, but that I regularly read about in the newspaper? Urban epistemology has to answer a lot of questions.

Third, and in close relation to the previous query, philosophy of the city as philosophy of the urban sciences has to discuss what kind of knowledge can be produced through scientific analyses of cities and urban structures. Kukla's account suggests that cities are individuals. If one gets to know a city, one does not get to know *the* city, city life as such. Is something similar true regarding the scientific study of cities? If so, scientific knowledge of cities could be compared to knowledge as it is produced in historiography. Typically, historians seek to analyze and explain *single* historical processes and events. In doing so, they rely on broader, for example, economic, theories. They might even refer to general patterns of human behavior or “psychological laws”. Nevertheless, good historical explanations pay adequate attention to a situation's particular contexts and specific circumstances. Is scientific knowledge of cities comparable to historiographical knowledge? Is it always knowledge tied to particular cities? Or can we justify approaches that are independent of particular cities that aim at generating knowledge about, let's say, specific types of cities?

These questions, to be sure, are interdisciplinary questions that can only be answered in exchange with, e.g., urban sociology and human geography. Likewise, the conceptual issues that I mentioned at the beginning of this section play an important role here. Nevertheless, the problem is basically a philosophical one and it should not be underestimated. If we take an epistemological account like Kukla's seriously, if we accept that urban knowledge is based on personal experience and tied to concrete places, it is hard to see how “abstract” scientific knowledge about cities—as opposed to scientific knowledge about particular urban places— should be possible at all, how it can be generated at all. If we want to allow for such abstract knowledge, we have to develop a plausible epistemological story leading from individual observations and assumptions to defensible generalizations and abstractions.

Finally, philosophy of the city as philosophy of a particular branch of sciences can contribute to ongoing methodological discussions. Philosophers of physics and philosophers of psychology discuss the philosophy of experiments to understand experimental practices, their merits and their potential flaws. Likewise, philosophers of the city can contribute to ongoing methodological discourses regarding urban research and its practices. I can only mention one very important example

here that is closely connected to the aforementioned problem of city-related urban knowledge: the practice of comparison.

Obviously, comparisons play an important role in everyday talk about cities as well as in public and political discourse and in urban research. However, it is highly contested how such comparisons should be grounded and how they can generate new and reliable insights. One could claim that only *qualitative* comparisons between single cities are possible and that they often reveal a complex mixture of analogies and disanalogies. One could go a step further and claim that it is in principle possible to develop analytic frameworks for urban comparisons. If research is focused on one aspect of urban development and if it is based on a specific range of theoretical and methodological assumptions, it might well be possible to develop a grid of categories that allow for at least semi-quantitative comparisons.² Of course, such accounts face the problem of theory-ladenness of observation philosophy of science has dealt with ever since. One could take another step and hold that quantitative comparisons between cities that allow for statistical analysis are possible and useful.³ In this case, the appropriate selection of data and a study's design are of crucial importance. In discussing these challenging methodological issues, philosophy of the city as philosophy of the urban sciences can profit from philosophical investigations into the nature of comparisons⁴ and from ongoing discussions in philosophy of the social sciences.⁵

Once again, many questions mentioned in this section need interdisciplinary discussions. Nevertheless, philosophy of the city as urban epistemology and philosophy of the urban sciences opens up their own perspectives on problems of urban experience and urban knowledge, independently of methodological and 'epistemological' debates in the urban sciences.⁶ We need these perspectives if we are to fully understand cities and city life.

² See, e.g., DiGaetano and Strom (2003), developed a framework for comparing urban governance based on theoretical assumptions derived from structural theories in sociology and rational choice theory. They identified five modes of urban governance, understood as "ideal types" (*ibid.*, 367), that provide a grid of categories for comparing political structures of cities.

³ As an example, take Masłowski and Kulińska (2020). Using the case study of a possible introduction of public bus transport in selected Polish cities, the authors aim to demonstrate that benchmarking processes that open up possibilities for quantitative inter-urban comparisons help to significantly improve the data basis on which decisions are made, for example in urban planning. For another example of quantitative comparison, based on DEA, see Jerabek et al. (2020).

⁴ For a current comprehensive study on the philosophy of comparison, see von Sass (2021, esp. Ch. 2 on different types of comparisons).

⁵ See Frank et al. (2014) for an inspiring collection of case studies on how philosophy might contribute to attempts at comparing cities. The project documented in this volume is connected to the *Eigenlogik*-discourse in German urban sociology, *i. e.* the idea that, despite all tendencies to (global) conformity and adjustment, each city nevertheless develops its own inner "logic", its own local practices and local forms of knowledge closely connected to these practices. The project uses methods in the tradition of philosophical phenomenology to show how different cities—Frankfurt, Dortmund, Birmingham, and Glasgow—develop their own modes of functioning and can nevertheless be compared with each other.

⁶ Again, conceptual clarity is important: In methodological debates, urban scientists quite often speak of "urban epistemology" when they are discussing methodological and theoretical issues. Take, as an example, the new "epistemological framework" for analyzing urbanization in the 21st century as proposed by Brennan and Schmid (2015) that basically deals with conceptual and theoretical questions like the adequate understanding and framing of "urban" and "urbanization". By contrast, "epistemology" in "urban epistemology" is used here in the traditional philosophical sense to denote the general theory of experience, perception, and knowledge.

3. Urban Normative Theory

Urban normative theory is a second way to do philosophy of the city. As I understand this project, urban normative theory seeks to spell out and interpret the central normative categories of ethics and aesthetics of social and political philosophy for urban contexts. It deals with categories like the right, the good, the just, the aesthetic, the democratic, and the powerful. Urban normative theory raises questions like these: What does it mean to possess a right to the city? When is life spent in a city a good, flourishing one? Which elements are constitutive for urban justice? How should a democratic city be organized? Given the state of the debate, philosophy of the city as urban normative theory has to face three important problems.

The first problem can be described as a problem of adequate, respectively inadequate exchange between normative discourses within the urban sciences on the one hand and practical philosophy and political theory on the other hand. Important parts of the urban sciences have always understood themselves not as merely empirical, but as critical, political, and normative disciplines. Therefore, they have developed their own traditions of understanding and using key normative concepts. This is especially true with regard to the idea of justice and the corresponding concept of a right to the city. Just take the most influential case of Henri Lefebvre: His well-known critique of practices of capitalistic urban development is based on a Marxist conception of justice (Lefebvre 1996). In consequence, important accounts of urban social justice, as developed by, for example, Harvey (2012, *Preface*) and Mitchell (2014, 17–21), followed Lefebvre's Marxist paradigm.

While the urban sciences have thus developed their own traditions of theorizing about justice, there has been little exchange with practical philosophy. This is surprising, as justice is *the* key concept of contemporary western political philosophy. Fifty years after Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* (1971), the variety of egalitarian, utilitarian, prioritarian, contractarian, libertarian, communitarian, sufficientarian, and capabilityarian accounts of justice, to mention just a few, is myriad.

Philosophy of the city as urban normative theory is the discipline that should aim at connecting the different normative discourses on justice and the right to the city again. All sides should welcome this. The urban sciences need such a discussion to test the robustness of their normative foundations. For their critique of urban injustice, their proposals for improvement will be less convincing, possibly even worthless, if they are based on a concept of justice that is not tenable, that is not checked against the background of current philosophical theories of justice and that cannot be defended against better theoretical alternatives. Susan S. Fainstein's *The Just City* (2011) might be considered as something like a role model for philosophy of the city as urban normative theory.⁷

Urban normative theory does not always face such problems of interdisciplinary mismatching as in the case of (urban) justice. The category of the democratic provides a more positive example of collaboration between the urban sciences, political theory, and political philosophy. To be sure, it is always possible to strengthen the exchange between disciplines. But let me mention two aspects, in which we can observe attempts at successful interdisciplinary cooperation. First, in discussing best practices, in designing procedures of democratic, participatory urban planning and urban develop-

⁷ Note that I am not defending here Fainstein's particular theoretical position (although I strongly sympathize with her). As well, it should be kept in mind that Fainstein works as an urban sociologist who combines theory with analyses of concrete cities like, in this case, New York, London, and Amsterdam. Nevertheless, I believe that her approach demonstrates how urban normative theory should connect philosophy of justice with specific questions of urban structures and city life.

ment, urban scientists adapted models developed in political science, like the idea of mini-publics.⁸ Likewise, they discuss how philosophical theories of democracy, like Habermas' theory of communication and deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996), might be used as groundwork for theories of urban (participatory) planning.⁹

Second, there is an ever-growing interest to better understand and fully analyze, empirically as well as from a normative point of view, the role of the (democratic) city within contemporary political systems and societies. Urban sociologists study large cities' impact as global actors in the economic and political systems of late modernity.¹⁰ Political theorists and philosophers analyze the relationship between democracy and the city. More specifically, they seek to determine the importance, range, and authority of democratic urban governance as opposed to other levels of statal, national/federal and transnational governance.¹¹ These normative discussions on democracy in cities, on democratic planning, and on cities as democratic agents illustrate the potential of an interdisciplinary exchange that enables philosophers as urban normative theorists, and urban and political scientists to learn from each other.

The second problem current urban normative theory must face is the problem of non-existent debates. Central debates in normative ethics have not yet been taken up by philosophers of the city. I believe it would be worthwhile to catch up here, as an engagement with these debates could unclose important perspectives for philosophy of the city and strengthen its conceptual equipment.

Two debates are of particular relevance. First, the question of the good life has experienced a major revival in philosophical ethics, leading to a variety of competing approaches. Philosophy of the city can draw on them in developing theoretical frameworks that enable us to understand the structures, elements, and prerequisites for flourishing urban lives.¹² In normative ethics, the category of the good has long been rehabilitated alongside the category of the right. Philosophy of the city would benefit from following this step and asking not only about the right to the city, but also about the good city.¹³

Second, in the last decades, ethicists showed a renewed interest in problems of meaning in life.¹⁴ It seems to be clear that the meaningful is an independent normative category that cannot be reduced neither to the good nor the right. If we accept this, questions come to mind immediately: What kind of possibilities for a meaningful life do cities contain? Why is it that some people find a meaningful life possible in a particular city, while others do not? Can major works of philosophical

⁸ See Beauvais and Warren (2019) for an example of using a deliberative mini-public-model in urban planning; cf. Hartz-Karp and Marinova (2021) for the use of collective decision-making methods in the tradition of deliberative democratic thought in urban sustainable planning processes in Australia.

⁹ Forester (1993) and Innes and Booher (2018) are examples for well-known accounts of communicative/collaborative planning that have been influenced by Habermas' theory of communication and democracy. See as well the brief history of Habermas' (and Dewey's) influence on planning theory presented in Mattila and Nummi (2022, 408–410).

¹⁰ See Saskia Sassen's seminal study (2001) and the volumes in Routledge's book series *Cities and Global Governance*.

¹¹ See Frick (2023) for an introduction to city-related debates in contemporary political theory. She offers a heuristic typology of four approaches that currently dominate the discussions on the relation between democracy and the city.

¹² For a brief introduction to the debate, see Crisp (2021).

¹³ Note, my point is not that philosophers of the city don't talk about the good city life, about values and happiness. Of course, they do. My point is that we lack a systematic exchange between philosophy of the city and current debates on the good life in normative ethics.

¹⁴ A current overview can be found in Landau (2022).

urban research such as Benjamin's *Arcade Project* be read as an attempt to find meaning in the city? Without doubt, confronting the meaning-in-life-debate can enrich philosophy of the city.¹⁵

The issues discussed so far in this section followed a certain pattern: normative categories—the right, the just, the democratic, the good, the meaningful—have been named. Urban normative theory's task has been specified as interpreting these broad normative categories for urban contexts. However, the third problem philosophy of the city as urban normative theory must deal with is the question of whether there exist normative categories that genuinely belong to the urban realm, that are not specifications of categories fundamental to practical philosophy.

In my view, the category of a city's identity is a plausible candidate for such a category. To be sure, urban normative theory might learn something from discussions about personal identity and from the ongoing debate between liberals and communitarians on the groundings of a nation's identity. Nevertheless, what distinguishes the question of a city's identity from other identity questions is a unique interaction of various factors. The identity of a city is determined by the complex interplay of physical and built structures, historically grown practices and cultures, everyday actions and much more. Because of this complex fabric, as indicated in Section Two, knowledge about a particular city is closely linked to personal experience. A nation-state's (unless it is not at the same time a city-state) or a person's identity is determined by very different factors. In this sense, urban identity is a category genuinely belonging to urban normative theory. And without doubt, identity is a category of normative importance. We might criticize as different things as a reform of district responsibilities, a new building in the city center, or the privatization of a public area as threatening a city's identity. Likewise, we evaluate political conflicts as struggles about urban identity.

Philosophy of the city as urban normative theory has developed several models to understand urban identity. I can mention only two of them here to illustrate how differently the category of urban identity can be spelled out. Shane Epting (2016) proposed a mereological model of urban identity as part of a "science of the city". According to this model, a city is analyzed as consisting of micro parts and macro parts, i.e. *e.* sets of micro parts. The interaction between these parts is defined as a city's meta-structures (*ibid.*, 1364–1366). In Epting's view, such a model shows that a city's identity is in permanent change, as its constituent parts are changing constantly. However, most of these changes are "harmless" (*ibid.*, 1366), as "meta-structures mostly remain stable" (*ibid.*, 1367).

Quill R. Kukla recently defended an ecological model, according to which processes of niche building, embodied routines, and micronegotiations are crucial for a city's and its places' identity (2021, e.g., 33–38). Identity is produced through a complex interplay between human agents and the built environment. In consequence, as different people share the same urban spaces, one city space might have multiple identities that might even conflict with each other (*ibid.*, 78, 119, 189).¹⁶

¹⁵ Once again, my claim is not that questions of meaning are not addressed within contemporary philosophy of the city. Especially within the phenomenological tradition, questions of meaning have always been present (for recent contributions, see Howell 2021 and Berstrand et al. 2022). Rather, my thesis is (again) that philosophy of the city lacks a systematic engagement with the meaning-in-life-debate as conducted in normative ethics.

¹⁶ As Kukla's subtitle *How Urban Dwellers and Urban Spaces Make One Another* indicates, philosophy of the city must discuss a second problem of identity, the identity of the urban citizen, the urban dweller, etc. See for example the contributions of Lake and Meagher in Meagher, Noll and Biehl (2020) that could be read as studies of philosophic-pragmatist, resp. flânerie urban identities.

As this brief overview shows, philosophy of the city as urban normative theory currently addresses pressing questions. At the same time, it needs systematic expansion if the goal is to fully understand all aspects of city life that matter from a normative point of view.

4. Applied Philosophy of the City

Finally, philosophy of the city can be practiced as a branch of applied philosophy. Probably most of the work that has been done within philosophy of the city in recent years could be described as applied philosophy of the city. The topics range from questions of urban mobility (Epting 2019) and technology in the city (Nagenborg et al. 2021) all the way down to critical analyses of urban modelling in the digital age (Johnson 2020) and platform capitalism in smart cities (Prien and Strüver 2021). The research field of urban aesthetics, which is closely linked to recent theoretical developments in environmental and everyday aesthetics, has proved particularly productive. As an applied philosophy of the city, urban aesthetics deals with problems as different as light pollution and the value of the urban nocturnal sublime (Stone 2021), green design (Saito 2007, 84–103), the impact of technology on urban aesthetic experience (Lehtinen 2021), and the aesthetics of different modes of urban transportation (Maskit 2018).

Why is it justified to classify these philosophical investigations—they might be ethical, political, or aesthetic—as *applied* philosophy? Naturally, they seek to develop a theoretical understanding of their topics and discuss problems of terminology and interpretation. Nevertheless, they are applied in the sense that they analyze practical problems of urban life as connected to, for example, the use of specific technologies and modes of transportation. The search for practical solutions, the identification of concrete possibilities for change and progress is a crucial part of the philosophical project. Not infrequently, these philosophical works arise in close exchange with other disciplines or in the context of interdisciplinary projects.

Applied philosophy of the city—as philosophy of the city in general—draws from a broad range of philosophical traditions and theories. Probably, the influence of phenomenology is most notable. However, traditions as different as hermeneutics, analytic philosophy, and ancient Greek philosophy with its special interest in the *polis* bear their influence on the field.¹⁷ Such an exchange between the different traditions has become rare in philosophy—and philosophy of the city benefits from its openness to differences.

In the future, applied philosophy of the city must address one problem well-known from other branches of applied philosophy, especially applied ethics. In treating a problem of applied philosophy, the choice of a specific theoretical framework is decisive. If one is rethinking the right to public urban space, one's ethical evaluation will surely depend on whether one chooses to apply a utilitarian or a Kantian framework. This problem is not trivial: On the one hand, if the results of studies in applied philosophy of the city should have some impact, if they, for example, should play a role in committees that advise and develop strategies for urban planning and development, they should rest on defensible philosophical foundations. As a philosopher, one should be able to defend one's philosophical starting points when confronted with an urban audience of different worldviews, and political and philosophical convictions. On the other hand, most philosophical foundations are no-

¹⁷For an example of using philosophical hermeneutics to analyze urban encounters, see Pathirane (2020). Allen Carlson's work is an important example of environmental and urban aesthetics in the analytic tradition (e.g. g. 2001, 2009). References to ancient, mostly Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of the city and their modern adaptations, for example in Hannah Arendt's work, are frequent.

toriously contested. We cannot wait to do applied philosophy of the city until the endless dispute between Kantians and utilitarians on the nature of morality is solved, until phenomenologists and analytic philosophers of aesthetics agree on the concept of the aesthetic, and until deliberative liberals and theorists of agonal democracy made terms on the basic structures of urban politics. In short, philosophers of the city have to ask themselves whether it is possible to ground applied philosophy of the city on foundations that are at the same time stable and uncontested, that provide a reliable working basis for dealing with problems and contexts of application.¹⁸

It might be helpful for applied philosophy of the city to examine how medical ethics, maybe one of the most developed branches of applied philosophy, has solved this problem. The most influential solution has been defended by Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress in their groundbreaking work *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (82019). They propose to use four principles—autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice—as the starting point for ethical reflection. These principles, they claim, are acceptable from the viewpoint of different strands of ethical theorizing like consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. These principles are in line with common (Western) morality and traditions of professional ethics of physicians and nursing personnel. In other words, the principles mark common grounds. By starting with these principles, Beauchamp and Childress avoid debates concerning the theoretical foundations of ethics where there is no prospect of reaching any agreement. Through strategies of specification and concretization, they aim to apply the principles to specific contexts and individual cases. In this way, they seek to find solutions that are at the same time ethically justifiable and acceptable for all persons involved.¹⁹

Can we identify principles that mark urban common ground, that might be used as starting points for studies in applied philosophy of the city? Principles we all agree upon, principles that can be further specified and concretized to deal with specific problems? Given the current state of the debate in the field, I tend to think that justice and participation are suitable candidates for such principles. Furthermore, it is striking that a great part of the recent literature in the field emphasizes the importance of the human body in the city, of bodily postures, experiences, dangers, and actions. It might, therefore, be worthwhile to think about a principle that focusses on bodily presence, whether it might be conceptualized as a principle of integrity, well-being, or flourishing.

These are nothing more than very initial considerations. Applied philosophy of the city is expanding. Therefore, it is time to reconsider its systematic foundations.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have only been able to briefly touch on many aspects. It is surely possible to criticize the proposed tripartite systematization of philosophy of the city, for example regarding the place of aesthetics within this structure. As well, the debate would certainly benefit from developing alternative proposals for systematization.

¹⁸ Such a discussion can, of course, also lead to the conclusion that corresponding foundations are not needed at all.

¹⁹ I cannot analyze the *principlism* in detail here. Of course, the model proposed by Beauchamp and Childress has provoked many critical responses that are discussed at length within medical ethics. Among other things, one can ask whether the *principlism* really remains neutral with regard to different strands of ethical theorizing and whether its connections to the common morality are problematic, in the sense of leading into relativism or in the sense of endangering the theory's critical power. Rauprich (2005) provides a comprehensive account of central objections and reconstructs how Beauchamp and Childress try to counter these objections in the *Principles'* several subsequent editions.

Whether one accepts this map or prefers an alternative: Any attempt at mapping forces us to think about the relationship between philosophy of the city, other branches of philosophy and all those other disciplines that participate in urban research. This helps us to sharpen our understanding of philosophy of the city's tasks. It helps us to identify open questions and problems that future philosophical urban research should address.²⁰

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