Introduction

- "I am a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the city do." (Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*, 230 d 3–4)
- "Philosophers have thought the city; they have brought to language and concept urban life." (Lefebvre 1996, 86)

When the urban riots erupted around the world in 1968, scholars turned their attention to cities and urban problems that had been long ignored. Urban studies programs blossomed and grew. Now many colleges and universities also house urban outreach centers that connect academics and community members. Such outreach programs are emblematic of a further academic recommitment to cities, to public scholarship, and to civic engagement initiatives.

Some contemporary political philosophers have turned to the city in their quest for a grounding of social ethics and political theory informed by the communitarian critique of liberalism (Young; Friedman 1993, 251–253; Meagher 1999). Others have expanded philosophies of place and environment to focus explicitly on the city, integrating aesthetic, sociopolitical, and ecological concerns (Light; Mugerauer; Norberg-Schulz). Current philosophical inquiries into human nature and identity tend to focus on the relationship between place and identity formation as well as issues of diversity (Conlon; Bickford; Mendieta; Weiss). Theorists of globalization are increasingly seeing the "global city" as the new locus of ethical as well as economic concern (Kemmis; Mendieta; Sassen 2000). Now there is also an increasing interest in renewing the vocation of philosophers as public intellectuals, and of returning to humanities education as the foundation for civic engagement (see, e.g., Spellmeyer 2003).

The renewed interest in the vocation of the philosopher is still met with a great deal of skepticism concerning the public relevance of philosophy, especially in regard to urban problems. There remains a pervasive

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belief that the problems of cities are so great as to be intractable, a view that "nothing can be done and that in any event it is not philosophy's business" (Fell 1997, 27). Ironically, even such anti-urban attitudes demonstrate the importance and influence of philosophy on our cities, because anti-urban attitudes are shaped by a stream of philosophical thought that rejects the city as the place where human nature and philosophy are best realized. In the United States, anti-urban attitudes are rooted in its legacy of anti-urban theory that extends at least as far back as Thomas Jefferson (White 1962). Following Rousseau and others, Jefferson rejected the philosophical view inaugurated by the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle that the good life could be best realized in the city. At the very least, then, the study of urban philosophy can and should play a central role in higher education civic engagement programs by confronting and critically analyzing anti-urban theory. Furthermore, philosophical traditions that link themselves positively to cities provide us with normative ideals of city life as well as civic engagement.

Our lives as citizens, that is, as civically engaged persons, are shaped by our answers to many questions. What is a good city? What is citizenship? How do we nurture meaningful, coherent communities that respect and support diversity? What standards of beauty should inform our architecture and urban plans? What kinds of built environments best sustain engaged human lives? How do we best achieve justice in our cities? These questions and their answers are informed by philosophy, yet they often remain hidden as unexamined assumptions in most urban policy discussions.

It is therefore often difficult to see why philosophy matters, especially to the city. "[Bertrand] Russell once observed that if the drawbridge operators went out on strike the impact upon the city would be felt immediately; if the philosophers went on strike, who would know it?" (Fell 1997, 27). Philosophers today often are spoofed just as Aristophanes characterized Socrates in his play *The Clouds*, that is, as impractical persons with their heads in the clouds who are pretentiously silly if not dangerous to the city.

In fact, "Socrates brought philosophy down from the skies to assume an earthly habitation" (McKeon 1949, 156); his interest was in making abstract philosophical questioning relevant to the city. Did Athenians find philosophy to be irrelevant or did it cut too close to home? Socrates described himself as a gadfly whose task was to raise awareness. But as Plato's allegory of the cave illustrates, those imprisoned in the darkness of ignorance will always find exposure to the bright light of truth to be painful (*The Republic*, Book VII, 514–521). In short, far from being irrelevant, Socrates made the philosopher all too relevant to the city, and

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thus found himself in danger. The Athenians' fear of philosophy had deadly consequences for Socrates, who was tried and convicted for the corruption of the youth of Athens and sentenced to death. But the attempts to banish philosophy from the city also have had detrimental consequences for cities. So, some philosophers throughout the history of Western thought have persisted in doing philosophy in and for the city.

The readings collected here are by philosophers from ancient to contemporary times, all of whom have written something about cities, urban problems, or the task of the public philosopher. These works have never been gathered together before. Although I had originally compiled the text in chronological order for simplicity's sake, reading the texts in chronological order reveals much about the history of philosophy and its relationship not only to cities, but to public life generally.

Western philosophy as we know it was born in the city; Socrates was the midwife. As the rural village became the ancient Athenian *polis* (city-state), philosophers such as Socrates raised questions about the very nature of this new form of settlement and way of life, and in doing so, developed a new way of thinking and inquiry that he distinguished from both classic Greek teaching as well as sophistry. Socrates called his teaching "philosophy." Although Socrates might have escaped the city and avoided execution, Plato's dialogues suggest that Socrates' relationship to the city was firmly entrenched well before his trial. As noted in the quotation from the *Phaedrus* at the outset of this essay, Socrates resisted an invitation to do philosophy outside the city's walls, claiming that only the city can teach him. For Socrates, the unexamined life—a life without philosophy—was not worth living. And the life of philosophy was nurtured within the walls of the city.

This is a familiar story to those who have studied Western philosophy, especially political philosophy. Many surveys of political theory begin with a section on philosophy and the city that focuses on the ancient Greek philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. And then philosophy seems to disappear from the city, at least in the way that we traditionally present Western intellectual history.

In an attempt to tell a different story, twentieth-century French philosopher Henri Lefebvre argues that in "classical philosophy from Plato to Hegel, the city was much more than a secondary theme, an object among others. The links between philosophical thought and urban life appear clearly upon reflection, although they need to be made explicit" (Lefebvre 1996, 86). *Philosophy and the City* aims to help readers make those connections and reflect on them.

This book offers a corrective to the usual history of philosophy by demonstrating that philosophy and the city have remained in productive

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tension with one another since Athens. The wisdom of philosophy is meant to be shared with citizens. As Richard McKeon argues, "political wisdom must be shared by all who benefit by it" (158). And that wisdom must be understood within the context of the city. In *The Good City and the Good Life,* Daniel Kemmis argues that if humanities and culture are not just words or academic constructs, then "their meaning had to be sought in and brought to bear on the real life of the real city" (59). The purpose and focus of this book is to do just that: to seek an understanding of philosophy in and through an examination of the city and to show how and why philosophy matters to the city.

I have already suggested briefly how philosophy might matter to the city, but we would be remiss if we did not also note philosophy's debts to the city. The city has been, and continues to be, an important crystallization of human civilization and its discontents. As such, cities focus and concentrate all of the key philosophical questions to which philosophers perennially return (Conlon; Fell 1997, 26; Mendieta 2001, 204, 208). The answers to those philosophical questions have varied throughout history, and we see them writ large in our cities. Further, cities also provide an important *context* for philosophical inquiry, the background against which philosophical questions are raised and shaped.

When we return to Western European philosophy's historical roots, we see that for ancient Athenians the city provided the very possibility of philosophy. As both Plato and Aristotle noted, philosophical reflection requires a certain amount of leisure time and active engagement in the social and political life of the city. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all shared an understanding of philosophy as the fundamental inquiry into human self-understanding within the context of human community. The city historically provided philosophy with its task, because the city defined what it meant to be a human (Fell 1997, 26).

But philosophy appeared in a certain kind of city, one that freed some from the drudgery of the work of economic subsistence. The ancient Athenian philosopher's life depended on the work of a majority of ancient Athenians, namely women and slaves, who were not granted the opportunity, education, or time to engage in philosophical reflection. Issues of diversity and social justice have been at the heart of the relationship between philosophy and the city since the rise of both in ancient Greece.

Cities are particularly effective in unlocking key questions in philosophy, questions not only in political and social philosophy, but also in metaphysics and epistemology, as we explore the essential nature of both city and humans, as well as in questions concerning place and identity formation, aesthetics, philosophy of race and diversity, and environmental philosophy. And the history of philosophy of the city is instructive in

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helping us map out how those questions shift over time, both in terms of the relative importance we give to them as well as in our answers.

Of course, both philosophy and the city have changed over time. Part of the historical role of the philosopher has been to define just what a city is. We will leave it to the philosophers anthologized here to take us through some of the most important variants in the history of the Western city, from the polis to the ancient Roman republic, the medieval walled city to the colonial settlement, the industrial city to the contemporary global city. While cities have changed over time, we identify all of these forms *as* cities (Weber; Mumford). All cities are human settlements that provide a relatively complex way of satisfying human needs that relies on human interdependence and some degree of specialization. Moreover, cities are occupied with what Lawrence Haworth calls the "whole round of life" (1963, 13), that is, with all facets of human endeavor and interest. Philosophers have differed in whether they understand the city primarily in terms of "urbs," that is, the physical layout and space of the city, or "civitas," that is, the people and their way of life, or some combination of the two (Kagen 2000, 9–10). We will see that while some definitions and metaphors have persisted through time, others fade away as new concepts are introduced and new historical circumstances demand new interpretations.

Cities can be defined in economic, political, and sociological terms. But the first thinkers to really explore the nature and concept of the city were philosophers. Philosophers began with questions about the very essence or nature of the city. Those questions were metaphysical as well as political, for they were viewed as the key to understanding human being—our very essence or nature. Pericles was not properly a philosopher, but his funeral oration helps us better understand Athenian ideals. Historians note that Pericles' description of the Athens of his day was not accurate; but he succeeds in beginning to articulate the ideals of the city—its democratic values and its reward of active citizenship—that later Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle scrutinize and thematize philosophically. For all three, justice was the city's central ideal that required inquiry and reflection. In his *Republic*, Plato creates a city "in speech" in a dialogue between Socrates and other Athenian citizens, because the justice of the individual is properly understood within the context of justice "writ large," that is, in the city (Book II, 368e1–374).

For Aristotle, the city is defined by its common end or good, which he identifies as justice (*Politics*, Book I). Pericles specifically praises Athen's openness, its willingness to welcome noncitizens, an issue slighted by his philosophical successors in favor of an emphasis on the essence of the city and the common good. We see this, for example, in Aristotle's introduction

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of the metaphor of the organism for the city. Aristotle likens cities to a living organism, a body politic, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A body politic is more than a collection of individuals. The common purpose of the city is to create and promote *eudaimonia*, which is best translated as "human flourishing." We fully realize what it means to be a human being in the polis. Aristotle asks what ideals are embodied in city life, what characteristics actual cities must have if they are to actualize those ideals. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were playing the role of the philosopher as gadflies who hold cities accountable to the values that they promise but do not always deliver.

We now leap forward in our story to the time of the decline of another great ancient city, Rome. In his philosophy of the city, St. Augustine blends the classic ideals of ancient Greek philosophy with Christianity. Influenced by Plato's emphasis on the importance of truthful definitions, Augustine argues that Rome was not really a city at all, since it failed to meet the definitional ideals articulated by Cicero. Augustine claims Rome failed to meet Cicero's definition of a republic as an "affair of the people" because there lacked common agreement about what is right (*City of God*, chapter 21). Through reason, a city should create a harmony among its parts. Augustine further argued that the common good lost on earth could only be re-created in a heavenly city.

By the time of the Renaissance, in Machiavelli's Florence, earthly cities and their princes seemed more interested in survival than in the common good. Machiavelli develops an instrumental morality that differs from both Greek and Christian moralities. For Machiavelli, the only worthy end is survival (power), and any means that secure that end are justifiable. While the end goal for both the Greeks and for Augustine is the good life, something that can only be realized in the city, the only end for Machiavelli is power. Machiavelli's conception of political rule is to exploit the prince's skill (*virtu*) to take advantage of what fortune provided in order to gain power, glory, and security. If a city creates problems for the prince, then Machiavelli advises the prince to destroy it rather than let it destroy his success. But Machiavelli distinguishes between two types of cities, those used to living under the rule of a prince (in which case the above applies), and those who live in freedom under their own laws. For Machiavelli, cities are only as good as the people who build them and create their laws.

While Machiavelli seems to give up on any substantive ideals, St. Thomas More, a British thinker of the same time period, created his *Utopia*. More's work is influenced by multiple ancient Greek influences, from the Stoics to Plato and Aristotle. His ideal city is Stoic in its

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intolerance for laziness or idleness. It is Platonic in his creation of an imaginary ideal city and its emphasis on communal organization and centralized political control. And it is Aristotelian in its understanding of human nature. More depicts humans as naturally cooperative and social. He focuses so fully on the need for common goals and bonds that he eliminates diversity from his city entirely.

Machiavelli, on the other hand, introduces an understanding of human nature that is competitive and individualist—a view that dominates the modern Western worldview. The reception of his work marks a shift in philosophical thinking about cities. Machiavelli's individualism and *realpolitik* are adopted by Thomas Hobbes, who also focuses on questions of survival. And during Hobbes's time we witness the development of the nation-state as the more important political entity than the city.

Although a few city-states (like Rousseau's beloved Geneva) continued to exist for the next centuries, the groundwork was laid for a shift of philosophy away from cities. The rapid urbanization (and correlative urban problems) that emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century became the study of social scientists more than philosophers. A few philosophically trained social scientists like Georg Simmel and Max Weber tried to return philosophy to the question, "what is a city?" and examine the changing nature of the city over time, but most philosophers did not pursue the inquiry. And the intellectual work done by figures such as Engels usually has been read as social science rather than philosophy (Meagher 2007).

In the twentieth century, philosophers who worked on urban questions largely focused on the rapid growth of cities and the rise of the "mass man," which they saw as a distinguishing characteristic of the modern city (see Mendieta 2001, 204). Some, like Mumford, returned to ancient Athenian concepts of community for the antidote to the increasing anonymity of big cities. Others theorized that the growth of negative urban traits was linked to the rise of capitalism and turned to Marx for analysis.

In more recent years, we have witnessed yet another shift in philosophy's relationship to the city. Although earlier philosophers focused on issues concerning the nature of the city and concepts of citizenship, more recent writings tend to focus on the built environment and on issues of diversity and economic justice. Philosophy has tended to retreat from the broader questions about the nature of the city and citizenship to focus on more particular questions raised within and by cities. Those philosophers who still pursue questions regarding the nature of cities and citizenship often draw on, or respond to, classical ideals, while some of the newer questions mark the breaking of new

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philosophical terrain. Philosophers are increasingly engaged in interdisciplinary discourses on the city that cross boundary lines with social scientists, architects, urban planners, and urban geographers.

This is an admittedly brief and oversimplified history of the relationship between philosophy and the city. The purpose of this book is to allow readers to complete and/or correct that history by taking their own historical tours of the readings in Part I. In that history, we note not only changes in the philosophical questions raised in and about the city, but also differences in understandings of the philosophers' task or the philosophers' role in the city and city life. The task of philosophy and the relation between philosophy and the city are themselves deeply philosophical questions.

Socrates introduced the role of the philosopher as gadfly, as critical examiner of the city and the philosophical foundations on which it is based. Socrates remains the model for many philosophers of the city who follow him. In Part II, which is organized around the foundational questions of the city that philosophers address, I provide an additional reading that illustrates a philosopher "at work" on the specific question or some aspect of it. Essays in Part I that address these issues are noted in the introduction to each section. These essays illustrate various ways in which the philosopher's task has been interpreted, reinterpreted, and practiced. Following Wittgenstein, some philosophers understand their role as a matter of looking and seeing, that is, as clarifying important concepts that are sometimes lost amid competing traditions or ideological noise (Fell 1997, 28). Others follow Dewey in focusing on the role of the philosopher as an interpreter of meaning. Dewey argues that the role of philosophy is to serve as a bridge between the new and the old by articulating the basic values of culture and reconstructing them into a more coherent and imaginative vision. Although some may not agree fully with Dewey's argument, most philosophers would agree that an important role—if not the most important one—is to help us imagine what *ought* to be. In that sense, the philosopher judges and prescribes (Haworth 1963, 11).

When we read the history of philosophy and the city, we notice that philosophers have engaged critically with both specific cities and specific urban issues. But the philosopher takes up these problems in ways that are often distinctive from more familiar contemporary social scientific approaches. Philosophers usually refuse the role of "expert" or technical problem solver. The task of the philosopher and his or her role in the city is complex. The readings in this text help situate social scientific accounts of urban issues within a larger philosophical and intellectual context. So, for example, the book presents a broader theoretical context by which one can begin to understand the social scientific analyses of

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issues like urban violence and poverty by raising important questions about justice, difference, and race. While contemporary philosophy of the city engages in dialogue with the social sciences, philosophy more explicitly and directly makes value claims and grounds those claims in critical arguments (see Haworth 1963, 11).

To help the reader better understand and examine how and why philosophical argument provides a foundation for other urban discourses, Part II also includes case studies that encourage readers to think about specific urban issues philosophically. In some instances, the cases invite the reader to examine critically the philosophical assumptions being made. In other cases, the reader is given the opportunity to put his own philosophical understandings of the city to work.

The two types of cases included in Part II illustrate respectively how "philosophy matters" and how and why the "city matters." The readings organized under the heading "city matters" are more properly case studies. These readings represent a diverse set of challenges that cities face to which readings in the first section of the book (Part I) might provide some insight. The "city matters" essays are therefore intended to be used as case studies in the usual sense of the term; they present readers with the opportunity to think more broadly and more deeply about how philosophy might apply to a wide range of city matters. In some instances, readers may find that the cases challenge us to see shortcomings in some philosophical arguments when they are put to the test.

Philosophy matters, cities matter, and it is time that we attended to both. I have provided readers with at least two possible roadmaps (starting in Part I or starting in Part II) by which to navigate these readings. Adventurous readers will discover unmapped routes. I hope that all readers will find whatever journey they take to be challenging, enlightening, and rewarding.

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