

Urban Ethics

Conflicts Over the Good and Proper Life in Cities

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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Part I

**Configurations of ethics and
the urban – concepts and
theories**

1 Introduction

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What constitutes a good life in the city, ethics under urban conditions or ethics of urban life? How do and how should people translate normative imperatives and reflections of “the good” into their everyday conduct of life in urban contexts and would that make for a “good” and possibly also emphatically “urban” life? Who gets to live this “good” urban life, who has the resources to engage in such reflections and whose ideas of the “good,” of morality and propriety, prevail in these urban ethics?

Questions like these are implicitly and explicitly being asked, debated, negotiated and fought over all around the world. This book and this introduction explore the overarching argument that, across their differences, such questions should also be seen and studied as questions of “urban ethics,” as practical negotiations and public debates over the “good” and “proper” or “right” way of living in cities and in urban ways, and that through them, conflicting values and interests are being expressed, addressed, worked through, sometimes neutralized, sometimes transposed and sometimes brought to an escalation. Urban ethics surface in concrete events and movements and in projects that are recognizably “ethical,” but they also have a much wider purchase. Focusing on them can help us understand a wide variety of urban situations better in contemporary societies, and also historically.

It is necessary to stress from the start that this is a book of interdisciplinary social and cultural research, not of philosophy. It also is a book devoted primarily to analysis and critical reflection, not toward finding a better and more ethical practice, at least not always and straightforwardly so. Contributions to this volume explore different aspects of the ethical dimension of urban life, of urbanism and urbanity, and the specific ways of articulating and resolving conflicts that it tends to entail. Many of them also ask how this relates to questions of politics and the political. Rather than seeking answers to urban-ethical questions in a normative register, that is, rather than trying to figure out what the “good” and proper life in cities “really” is and should be, the book’s contributors – without, of course, denying the importance of ethico-political reflection and action – study ethics as a sociocultural phenomenon that involves discourses, practices and materiality. As sociologist and anthropologist Didier Fassin summarizes a recent

wave of “moral anthropology” and similar interdisciplinary works, these writings,

rather than defining what is “morality” and verifying whether people’s deeds and judgments correspond to the definition, (...) tend to apprehend morality in acts and discourses, to understand what men and women do which they consider to be moral or good or right or generous.
(Fassin 2012b, 6)

This book is written in a similar spirit of inductive, empirical inquiry as that summarized by Fassin. It is scaffolded and supported by theoretical reflections on ethics and the urban and on normative dimensions of urban life more broadly.

Still, “ethics” is a loaded term with contested meanings and borders, and the way the concept is understood inevitably shapes the direction of inquiry. Therefore, it requires at least some initial clarification. To pose a question about urban situations as a question of urban ethics is, in our view, first of all, to ask “how one should live in the city.” There are many ways of doing this, many places and positions from which to pose this question, many ways of understanding, for example, the normativity of “should,” or the subject of ethics, the “one.” In predominantly secular, late- or post-modern contexts, posing such questions usually means envisioning debates about choices that individual subjects should make freely, on their own accord, because they are motivated by a desire to do what is “good” and “right” or “proper” (and perhaps also to live their life so that it will have been a good life). This understanding of ethics prevails, for example, in rhetoric and codes addressed to professionals and experts of all sorts or, in a slightly different sense, in ethical interpellations of good consumers, responsible users of public amenities and so forth. “Ethics,” in that sense, is usually understood as running counter to mere self-interest, to a logic of “partisan” political allegiance, to economic rationality/profitability, or mere hedonism, even if all of these orientations could of course also be understood as “ethics.”

Such a view is characteristic of many more recent academic accounts of ethics as well. It involves a strong sense of voluntarism and rationalism (see, critically, Holbraad 2018, 33–37), and it often places great importance on individuals’ freedom to work on the obstinate “ethical substance” of their inner selves, their habits, desires, interests or even cultural traditions, and to live up to ethical values and virtues despite the draw that other motivations represent (Faubion 2011; Laidlaw 2014). In a sense that is only slightly different, ethics is often also understood as primarily shaped through free societal reflection and debate, as in Habermas’s ideal of consensus-seeking discourse ethics (Habermas 1990) and the Kantian tradition of ethics based on duties. There are, of course, many other accounts of ethics in social and cultural research that are much more relational and less rationalistic (in sociocultural anthropology, see only Das 2015; Trnka and Trundle 2014; Zigon

and Throop 2014), but the former meanings are, in our view, predominant – at least within initiatives for getting people to live better lives and, thus, build better cities, which is one important starting point for research on urban ethics.

Ethical events and the promise of open cities

Munich, in Germany, the city where the research group is based from whose work some of the chapters in this volume stem, is a good place to start looking more closely at public representations of urban ethics – not because it is a particularly “good” city, whatever that would mean, but because it has come to stand for “ethical” action by urban dwellers in a particular way. In the late summer of 2015, this somewhat saturated, economically successful Bavarian city, with its socially liberal tendencies and conservative backbone, became a near-global symbol for welcoming migrants and refugees, a place where many urban dwellers were doing simply the right thing in the face of human suffering and the callousness of European politics – or, from the skeptics’ viewpoint, Munich became an example of a symbolic excess, an overreach of ethics, out of touch with (supposed) “popular” morality and realism in immigration matters.¹ At Munich Central train station, in late summer 2015, thousands of volunteers welcomingly cheered the new arrivals in the trains that had come from Hungary and Austria, many of whom were war refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq who had crossed the Mediterranean Sea. Volunteers handed out food, clothing, SIM cards and so on, acts which were immediately televised and broadcast, as well as shared on social media. In doing so, these refugees and their supporters became part of an assemblage of actors that temporarily defeated the European Union’s border regime, or so it seemed, in what can be seen as a genuinely political act (Hess et al. 2017). In these actions, people signaled that refugees and migrants were indeed welcome, at least in cities like Munich. Some of the activists – if that is the right word, not everyone would subscribe to it – involved had been active in antiracist, anti-border campaigns for many years. Some had been migrants and refugees themselves. Most, however, were neither, and they emphasized that they were motivated primarily, even “compelled,” to do what is right and good.² In such statements, there was also something oddly and conspicuously “ethical” about the Munich events. It was not just that these actions were morally good, but that they were exemplary of acting in an ethical way. In that sense, these events were also taking place below, above, beyond and, in a way, against the realm of politics. This has not been lost on high-profile observers either: Sociologist and urban theorist Richard Sennett, in a chapter of reflections on the figures of “Alien, Brother, Neighbor” in his recent *Building and Dwelling. Ethics for the City*, inspired by philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Okakura Kakuzo, takes Munich in 2015 as an exemplary case for moments of ethical openness in cities where “the Other appeared as a brother” (Sennett 2018, 122). The fact that these events could be taken

for ethical action and an open city in such an emphatic and exemplary sense probably has something to do with the political context in this specific historical moment, where Europeans acting kindly to people from relatively far away and toward people who were likely to be Muslim in particular seemed increasingly unlikely. It also relates to the voluntary, nonprofessional, non-state, self-organized nature of many of these acts of support and solidarity, their apparent disconnect from self-interest and their unfolding on a human, person-to-person scale of encounter and care.³ Furthermore, Sennett is not alone in using an interpretative framework that is not just about morality and ethics but also about what people think a “city” and “urban” life should be. As researchers in our group discovered, in the rhetoric and the imagery of “welcome,” people involved in refugee support initiatives in Munich often referred to the heterogeneity and diversity of urban life and turned it into an ethical argument in a different sense: To live in a city “should” mean to live with strangers, to “tolerate” or even embrace difference and heterogeneity, to create an open city.⁴

Quickly, of course, difficult questions about the nature of a “welcome culture” and its limits arose: About the paternalistic and hierarchical patterns in many practices of aid and support and about their genealogy, about empowerment and disempowerment, representation and misrecognition, about the direct and indirect violence of humanitarianism, on which critical anthropological research has focused so much over the last few years (Fassin 2012a; Ticktin 2011, 2014). By now, an army of critical researchers has descended upon the welcoming and integration initiatives, in Germany and elsewhere, and is thinking through these questions (see e.g. Braun 2017; Hamann and Karakayali 2016; Sutter 2017).

Since then, furthermore, a strong anti-immigrant and anti-immigration backlash has taken place, as Sennett also notes. Not only does this backlash highlight the ways in which urban-ethical interventions are intertwined with political conflicts and confrontations, but it is also noteworthy because configurations of ethics and urbanity are highly relevant in that backlash itself: For many right-wing populists, and some left-wing populists as well, the denunciation of what they consider “rootless,” cosmopolitan ethics, as opposed to local moralities, is once more crucial. The concomitant negative stereotypes, such as *Gutmenschen* (literally “good-humans,” do-gooders), *Bahnhofsklatscher* (“train station clappers”) in German, are, among other things, stereotypes of naïve ethical overreach that also have an urban tinge, from “urban liberals” and “urban progressives” to city-dwelling Muslim immigrants whose designation as “urban” (at least in English, not so much in German) carries its own connotations.

In events like these, the openness of cities and the question of how one wants to live in the city become concrete, social, spatial, organizational matters. A more just, more open city becomes a momentary possibility, in events that one can remain true to from there on (Badiou 2012b; Swynge-douw 2017). Our claim is not, of course, that people in Munich are or were

particularly “good” under some universal or particular ethical standards. But the events have, in our view, underlined the urgency of questions about ethics and urban life, about the potentialities, the limits and the conjunctural contexts of urban-ethical engagements. Subsequent negotiations over the meanings of the Munich events and others like them, in turn, illustrate the diagnostic political potential of a focus on urban ethics. We will not go into these questions further here (see, among others, Ege and Gallas 2019); instead, we will turn to other aspects of urban ethics – first, their widespread organization as “projects,” then a broader sense of the normative dimensions of urban life.

Improving urban life: ethical projects, neoliberal governance and post-politics

The ethical dimension of urban life has long been an implicit concern in writings and research on the city, but it has attracted academic attention in a more direct, explicit sense in recent years (see Amin 2006; Cojocaru 2012; Ege/Moser 2017; Moraitis/Rassia 2019; Mostafavi 2017b; Sennett 2018; Dürr et al. 2020) so that this volume is part of a wider trend and an emerging debate. This new interest is probably no coincidence but a conjunctural effect, not just in the widely diagnosed (and widely criticized) “ethical turn” in all sorts of societal fields, including academic discourse and procedure,⁵ but in cities specifically: While our initial example from Munich refers mainly to an event and its aftermath, many cities today are full of what can be termed “ethical projects,” projects for improving not just the quality but the ethical character and the ethical valence of urban life.

Again, our designation of such projects as “ethical” is not intended to suggest that we think that they are necessarily “good.” They may well be, they may well not be. The designation is not meant as a normative evaluation, but in order to state, in a descriptive or analytical register, that these projects, regarded in the context of societies’ different semantic codes or frameworks, in important ways belong to the code or framework of ethics.

Such “ethical projects” tend to work toward avowed goals, such as ecological (“green”) sustainability, social and cultural inclusivity and openness, participation, collaboration, conviviality, consensus- and community-building, and transparency. They represent one very obvious form of engaging in urban ethics. Some of them are large in size and scale, such as newly planned and developed entire “eco-cities” (see Sze in this volume). Most of them are much smaller and more clearly delineated affairs, seeking small- or medium-scale improvements to concrete aspects of urban living, practice-oriented and pragmatic-sounding, self-confidently productive, while, in most cases, opposing more strongly “ideological” mobilizations and schemes for systemic change or, at least, giving them lower priority (Mostafavi 2017a, 11).⁶ “Ethical projects” are future-oriented undertakings with a certain amount of pre-planning, self-awareness and intentional

communication that promise better or more just cities and a better urban life through assemblages of policy, technology, buildings, aesthetics and institutions, and also a ethico-moral sense of “something better.” They usually employ non-repressive ethico-political strategies and tactics (“technologies” in Foucauldian parlance) to instigate improvement and change, such as creating affordances, incentives and inspiration, and engaging in persuasion, “nudging” and other “smart solutions” (and win-win models/imaginaries of social change) rather than more confrontational political contestation – although this is an ideal type and real cases may very well include elements of the latter as well. Ethical terms are often used quite conspicuously in such projects’ public communication (e.g., “green,” “good,” “open,” “fair,” “sustainable,” “inclusive”); they tend to exhibit something like an ethical surplus. As philosophers have long pointed out, the meanings of the “good” are complex and far from easy to grasp. This is an important point to consider in this case as well: The “hedonic” sense of “good” in urban-ethical projects as enjoyable, the “technical” and “instrumental” sense (as in, for example, long-lasting, well-made), and a more strictly “moral” and “ethical” one, relating to values and a greater good, tend to intertwine and “bleed” into each other, which is most obvious in food-related projects but not only there. Notions of the “good” that are implied in urban-ethical terms such as “quality of life” and “livability” tend to mix those kinds of evaluations as well.

Ethical projects also tend to exude and encourage positive (“warm”) affects or sentiments of doing something good and being aware of it on the side of initiators and participants. Among the latter, this often comes about through practices of ethical consumption and, as one could say more critically, a modified form of consumerism (Barnett 2011; Thompson 2012), though the question of how people actually experience and engage in this is largely an open one. At the same time, there are also many non- and anti-consumerist urban-ethical projects, such as non-monetized sharing programs or spectacular versions of publicly owned housing construction, with an “ethical,” “participatory” and “smart” surplus. All of them, however, approach issues, concerns, matters, challenges and conflicts of all sorts in some way as questions of urban ethics, such as those posed in the beginning of this introduction. In some cases, this is very much a transformation and a translation, an “ethicization” and a programmatic move away from the political, maybe even its displacement and repression. In others, such as stand-out projects for public housing, the irreducible ethical dimension of life makes itself felt in the context of urban interventions of different types, because to build almost inevitably can also be read as to address the question of how one should live, and becomes amplified.

Exemplary ethical projects include local environmental action, such as recycling schemes (see Fischer in this volume), “social design” innovations with an urban focus, (mobility) device sharing services, pro-bike campaigns with a practical focus and the like, newer forms of building cooperatives

(see Gozzer and Ott in this volume), urban gardening or beekeeping initiatives, community-based agriculture organizations, local energy initiatives, participatory planning and building processes (see Bikbov in this volume; Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017; Kaltsa 2019), campaigns for better neighborly relations and understanding, and even campaigns against loneliness (Muehlebach 2012). Many of them are situated in fields of urban policy, initiated, funded and administered by various constellations of state agencies, NGOs and similar institutions, and businesses, “top-down” and “bottom up” and many things in between (Crouch 2011), and they can also overlap with fields such as education, political activism and, arguably, advertising and public relations. Ethical projects of similar kinds can also emerge from and be part of the art field, especially in relational/social practice and interventionist projects that problematize and reshape everyday urban life (Bishop 2012; Cruz 2012; N. Thompson 2012). They are prevalent in relatively rich countries, often thriving in middle-class lifestyles where, in an overall context of material abundance (and, possibly, feelings of guilt), they can contribute to an ethicized form of self-fashioning, but that is far from their only site if only because of the work of NGOs, governments and also bottom-up initiatives that address practical problems. “Scaling up” and multiplying projects is a goal of larger-scale initiatives that seek to motivate and guide others to start and direct ethical projects. The “conduct of conduct” works on different levels.

Ethical projects are of course far from new. A historical perspective is indispensable for understanding the difference they try to make and the power relations in which they are embedded, as each of these fields has its own historical genealogies, touching upon different forms of governmentality and expertise, moral and life reform movements, religious/spiritual practices, and so on. In the case of urban-interventionist art, for example, these genealogies involve avant-gardes’ discontent with the art/life disconnect, pedagogies of “activation” and emancipation, community-oriented arts close to new social movements, socially engaged architectural practice, political theatre and neoliberal cultural policy oriented toward “relevance” (Bishop 2012), among other strands. How one tells and prioritizes these histories is, of course, a deeply political question (see Doucet in this volume): Are their histories within dissident and emancipatory social movements central? Or those within religions? Or a logic of neoliberalism?

Current academic research on cities is closely entangled in such “ethical projects,” be it affirmatively or critically. Many projects for improving urban life are co-developed and/or evaluated by university-based researchers, and research projects with a collaborative bent themselves are usually planned, stylized and carried out as “ethical projects” in the sense under discussion here. In no small part, this is due to funding priorities and procedural rules (such as ethics committees). However, there are elective affinities and convergences in a broader sense as well, coming from different directions, such as political activisms and their “ethicization” of academic work, but also a broader and in some ways quite contradictory logic of governmentality.

The field of what we term “ethical projects” overlaps in many ways with forms and techniques of neoliberal “governance-beyond-the-state” that grew in states such as the UK in the late 20th century. As Swyngedouw put it, neoliberal governance is not only scaled up to supranational entities, such as the European Union or World Trade Organization, but also downscaled to networks of private, public and third sector actors on a city and neighborhood/community level, “celebrating the virtues of self-managed risk, prudence, and self-responsibility” (2007, 5).⁷ The “re-scaling” of governance toward the city scale (Schiller and Çağlar 2009) also makes questions of politics, ethics and contestation on this urban level (and below) more prominent. Scholars and theorists critical of “ethicization” have stressed that these consensus-oriented techniques, many of which gained prominence during the 1990s and 2000s, the heydays of “Third Way” neoliberalism, are part and parcel of a landscape that can be described as post-political and post-democratic (Swyngedouw 2007, 2009; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014). If civil society takes the role of participant and co-initiator of ethical projects that can be regarded as part of a wider hegemonic bloc, rather than challenging that bloc more directly, “real” political conflict and contestation are foreclosed, as are discussions over systemic alternatives. In ethical/moral frameworks, where “the ethical stance” is taken for “the ultimate horizon of and for political action” (Swyngedouw 2017, 56), movements for more radical change tend to be cast as completely beyond the pale, outside “reasonable” morality (Mouffe 2005). Some would argue that mutual recognition actually becomes more difficult when conflict and competition are “moralized,” as moral statements also assign worthiness and unworthiness of respect (see Bogner 2011; Luhmann 2008a). As some of the chapters in the volume show, many “ethical projects” can indeed be analyzed in a similar way, and such diagnoses can be useful starting and reference points for understanding “ethical projects” and for articulating critique.

All this ethics talk and the prominence of ethical projects that appear in many cities stand in a strange contrast to the violence and brutality and also the banality of much of actual urban life (Bauman 2003; Simone 2015). This does not necessarily make for a particularly original or even critical observation, as diagnoses of an alarming status quo are often the very starting point of such initiatives: It is this contrast that makes them “promising” (and, potentially, “cruelly optimistic”; see Färber and also Moore and Sze in this volume). Capitalist urbanization continues at a rapid pace; most readers will have read statistics hundreds of times by now, according to which over half of the world’s population are now living in cities and that, by 2050, two-thirds of the world’s inhabitants will live in cities. But for multitudes, while images of “the good life” are constantly promised and broadcast, urbanization remains far from delivering lives where people can truly flourish, by their own standards or those of outside ethicists. Devastating effects of climate change destroy livelihoods; the growth of cities goes along with deep poverty and social polarization, a lack of rights of the newly urbanized

and a decline of living conditions and increasing dependency in rural areas. In many parts of the world, it is authoritarian nationalism that makes promises for countering the effects of neoliberal globalization that resonate with multitudes and escalates ethnic tensions and racist structures. While functionalist planning and architecture of the modernist and Fordist era in Europe provoked a radical critique of banal and alienated life (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Lefebvre 2014), today's inner-city gentrification is criticized not only for the displacement it creates but, again, also for the banal consumerism (Harvey 2013; Susser and Tonnelat 2013) and the "bad" architecture it encourages.

Faced with such bleak diagnoses, many small-scale "ethical projects," with all their avowed goodwill, and even scenarios of a "good city" or a "just city" (Fainstein 2010) or "a just distribution justly derived at" (Harvey 2009) more broadly, may also seem irritatingly detached from "what is really going on." They can also become a subject of ridicule in popular culture and elsewhere (see e.g. *Habit* in this volume). This is, at least partly, because it tends to remain unclear what kind of model of urban change they stand for: Is the plan for those projects to somehow add up and for people to then just act "better," following the examples of groups of pioneers and regulators? Social and behavioral science and political theory of various types would obviously encourage us to be skeptical here. In that context, the ways in which (and the extent to which) urban political movement activism also shares in "ethicized" rhetoric and forms of contention become particularly relevant for a diagnostics of the present (see the chapters by Bikbov, Reznikova, Susser, and Florea/Gagy/Jacobsson in this volume; also Dean 2014 and Swyngedouw 2017).

All of this should sensitize us to ethical projects' contexts, their limits, their potential unintended effects and their problematic relationship to politics and the political. Still, to simply dismiss ethical projects lock, stock and barrel as embodying neoliberal ideology would surely be too easy as well. We use the term "ethical projects" broadly and heuristically here, not as a clear-cut analytical term in a strong sense or as part of a strict all-encompassing typology.⁸ It is useful, first of all, for pointing out a family resemblance of tendencies and overlapping traits in ethicized and ethicizing forms of problematizing urban lives (again, see programmatically, Moore's contribution) and to ask questions about their effects within specific contexts, while also taking account of larger forces that, in many ways, shape them, such as those pointed out by the literature on the post-political city. While similar issues arise and comparable dynamics are at play in many ethical projects, which are worth pursuing, as the contributions show, we do not intend to argue that these projects and their meanings, effects and dynamics are ultimately all the same. Different kinds of subjectivities, spaces, publics and connections can also arise in them (Mouffe 2017, 226). Taking up critical analyses such as those of the post-political city, we intend to raise a series of questions and invite comparisons and theorizations.

Beyond presentism: ethics and the normative dimension of urban life

When it comes to the kinds of projects outlined here, or events like those in Munich in 2015, their “ethicity,” their belonging to a realm of ethics, is fairly easy to make out, and the case why they can be usefully studied in terms of urban ethics is relatively straightforward. The latter also suggests relatively clear historical periodizations, as the “post-politics” debate has shown: Here, similar to other fields, the “ethicization” of political language and forms regarding urban life is closely tied to a time after the fall of “really existing” socialism in Eastern Europe (and its transformation into, broadly speaking, state capitalism in China and Vietnam) and the rise of neoliberalism. Given the individualistic vocabularies and voluntaristic imaginations of action in which urban-ethical questions are often embedded today, there is an obvious elective affinity between them and recent decades of neoliberal governmentality and the rule by technocratic experts, in one way or another (Clarke and Newman 2017; Collier 2017).

However, it needs to be stressed that questions of urban ethics also have a far wider scope; they are relevant in different historical conjunctures and sociocultural contexts far beyond and above these recent “ethicizations.” Within very different historical conjunctures and societal contexts, cities have been spaces of moral regulation (Hunt 1999; Ruppert 2016), sites of reforms and disputes that “moralize” urban life, of ethical utopias small and large (Sennett 1990, 2018), and of the myriad forms of subjectivation that, following Foucault, we have come to call ethical as well (Collier and Lakoff 2005; Faubion 2011; Foucault 1985). Furthermore, “good” urbanity and “urbanity” as an ethic, a guiding principle, ambition, a virtue and perhaps also a duty that is closely intertwined with forms of governance are recurrent themes in a wide variety of contexts, as many contributors to this volume show. Globally, this involves different trajectories of constructing urbanity through normative ethics (see e.g. Lafi, Baumeister, Habit, Neumann/Strutz and others in this volume on the medieval Arabic, modern Mediterranean, 20th-century Romanian and 20th-century Turkish context).

Taking this perspective and using such a wider sense of urban ethics, many of the chapters in this volume, particularly its second section, study ethics as a ubiquitous dimension of urban life, thought and discourse. In that sense, urban ethics represent a plane of interpellations, negotiations and confrontations. The latter cohere around questions about the good and proper/right life and good urban subjects, which concern matters of planning and building but also literary, including essayistic, writing and, of course, the practices of everyday life. In approaching urban ethics in this way, these chapters explore and uncover their forms and effects in a variety of historical eras and different sociocultural and religious contexts and traditions. We can tie this back to the arguments of social theorists such as Andrew Sayer (2011), who challenge cultural and social research to pay

closer attention to the normative dimension of everyday life, rather than, for example, reduce it completely to ideologies, social processes, the logic of practice or political antagonisms. In the context of our discussion, we of course need to “urbanize” these arguments. It also incurs the risk of adding to “ethicization” and “moralization,” but this is a risk worth taking.

In a lot of the related historical literature, however, a terminology that revolves around morality, moral reform, moral panics, moral economies and so forth is predominant rather than a language of ethics. This volume departs from that tradition by making urban ethics, not morality, the central term. In analyzing urban ethics in this wider sense, it is helpful to consider the work of anthropologists Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff, who reformulated Michel Foucault’s work on ethics and the subject in their remarks on “regimes of living,” and distinguish different components of ethics. In Foucault’s later-phase works, in which he genealogically traces the history of sexuality to late Roman antiquity, Greek sources and others (far from late-modern neoliberalism!), the basic ethical problematization can be formulated as the question “How should one live?” (Collier and Lakoff 2005, 22). Ethical practice engages with that question. It relates to “moral codes” dominant in a society during a particular time, but it is not exhausted by them; rather, ethics consist of the ways in which people apply, adapt, reflect or reject these codes in conducting their lives. This is the basic conceptual distinction between morality and ethics in that intellectual tradition.

Similarly, we suggest that urban ethical matters, in that wider sense, are attempts to formulate answers to the question: “How should one live in the city?” Through urban ethics, people do so practically and theoretically, implicitly and explicitly. Following Foucault and Collier and Lakoff, this question has the following components (Collier and Lakoff 2005, 22): (a) Imaginations of practices and virtues deemed good and right or proper (“how”), (b) types of normativity involved, that is, the norms, values, virtues and incentives working on what Foucault calls the “ethical substance” (“should”) (Foucault 1985, 275), and (c) actors and the imagined models of the ethical subject (“one”/“we”). We can add (d) imaginations of “good” urbanity/cityness and urban forms of life (“live in the city”) to this, in order to “urbanize” the ethical question. These components can play out in quite different ways in terms of both the contents and the forms of ethics, as we will see below.

Given these stipulations, ethics can be understood as the ways in which individuals engage with and relate to moral codes, as socially legitimated and, in that sense, normative “good” behavior and “proper” (or “right”) conduct of life. Ethical practice is a form of subjectification or subjectivation, of becoming a type of subject. It is also a form of subjection that relates individuals and groups’ regimes of living to broader configurations of power and rule. In that sense, we can also see discourses and infrastructures that work toward achieving certain forms of subjectification and ethical practice in cities as urban-ethical discourses, devices and so forth. For Foucault, famously, governmentality consists of creating and shaping rooms for

freedom and ethical choice, the “conduct of conduct,” indirectly directing the way others conduct themselves; that is, the power of governmentality always also moves in the medium of ethics. Again, social actors themselves may or may not label this explicitly as “ethics” or as “ethical,” but, in engaging with how one should live in the city, they refer to values, virtues and the conduct of life and, by that, contribute to urban ethics.

For actors in urban settings, the relevance of the question: “How should one live in the city” (and potentially also how to live it “in an urban way”), in the past and present, can be a matter of the “conduct” of everyday life and of a variety of discourses and institutions that touch upon this conduct. Seen from this angle, urban ethics are not only an experts’ debate, a matter of planning, public policy, project design, professional ethics codes and commissions, or high-minded discourse. They also involve ambitions and moral sentiments about urban life that people take to be deeply individual and personal, and they play out in microlevel interactions in the everyday and mundane, as well as during high-profile events. Ethics, in this wider sense, points beyond so-called rational discourse; it involves affect, habit, imagination and embodied practice, which often remain implicit in lived practice, gestures and silence.

This is relevant in all sorts of regimes, not just neoliberal, but, for example, in socialisms, in early liberal capitalism and before (Weber), in all sorts of religious contexts, and in relation to nationalism. In acknowledging this, we also need to keep in mind the variability of Foucault and Collier and Lakoff’s “components” (ethical substance, types of normativity, ethical subjects) and the wide range of forms that the components of ethics as a practice, in that sense, can take. Different forms of normativity can structure textual and speech forms, rhetoric, discourse – authoritative “descriptions” that are really ideological calls to duty for a higher, national good, for example (see the chapters by Strutz/Neumann and Busenkell in this volume), the explicit proclamation of rules that people should follow within a specific moral economy (see Lafi in this volume) or interpellations of self-motivating, constantly self-improving subjects (see Gozzer, Färber, Fischer and Ott in this volume). As theorists of urban planning and design (Mostafavi 2017a; Sennett 2018), along with theorists of the materiality of the urban social (Blok and Farias 2016), would argue, this is a matter not only of discourse in a textual sense but also of the affordances of architectures and infrastructures of all sorts that are irreducible parts of these discursive normativities and have wills of their own.⁹ Similar differentiations could be made regarding the meanings of the “ethical” in the context of practices such as prayer, preaching, asceticism, learning and teaching, meditation, self-reflection, self-disciplined consumption, enforcing rules for debate, self-surveillance (analog or digital) and also playing games, organizing pleasures of different kinds, or engaging with art and popular culture. Practices and relations, then, can be “ethical” and “ethicized” in very different ways and to different degrees.

It could be argued that there is a contradiction in claiming, as we have done, that, on the one hand, urban ethics involves a problematization of the given forms of urban life and, therefore, are a step away from the routines and out of the “natural attitude” of everyday life, in Husserl’s (1913) sense, and, on the other hand, that ethical normativity pervades everyday existence and societal and technological arrangements in general, which would mean that it does not require any form of rupture or distancing. Within the (sociocultural) “anthropology of morality,” this has indeed been a crucial topic of contention (Das 2015; Lambek 2015; Venkatesan 2015; Zigon 2007). We will not solve this conundrum here, but, in our view, it is productive to take a more pragmatic and heuristic approach to the conceptual distinction between morality and ethics, and to ask at what point in thinking through what people do this distinction actually becomes a problem – because the distinction does become meaningful repeatedly and is, therefore, difficult to ignore. This has a conceptual and a methodological side: As Andrew Sayer puts it, a distinction like Foucault’s “makes sense,” but it is just one such distinction within philosophical debates and their histories, and a fairly restrictive one at that.¹⁰ Different ones may prove useful in other contexts. In actual analyses, furthermore, one usually always deals with morality and ethics at the same time. Returning to Fassin, it is worth taking seriously his methods-oriented argument that qualitative researchers, such as ethnographers (and, we could argue, historians and literary scholars), in their research, encounter concrete, normatively charged statements and feelings about the good and proper way of living one’s life that people make or have in actual life. The “contours” (Fassin 2012b, 9) of and the boundaries between the ethical and the political and ideological, as well as those of ethics and morality, will necessarily be much less sharply drawn on that basis than those that philosophers or conceptually oriented sociologists arrive at through thought experiments, deductive reasoning or laboratory experiments. This does not mean that they are meaningless, but they are a tool for developing diagnoses and arguments, not a goal in themselves.

Therefore, in many of the chapters in this volume, related dynamics and types of normativity will also come into view, such as moralities in different understandings and “moral economies,” that is, references to an older economic order where values such as justice and respect are taken to have played a more significant role (Edelman 2012; Götz 2015). This is because, in a more general sense, these analyses always also want to better understand the ways in which conflicts over the “good” and “right” or “proper” conduct of life in cities can be seen as an arena where other conflicts, for example, those over rights to specific spaces or over the power to represent others, are played out. Negotiations in a moral and ethical register, a register of negotiating, regulating and performing urban life, can become particularly useful for different actors when legal or political means seem out of reach or are more difficult to apply, at least initially, as Strutz and Neumann have argued. In a wide variety of circumstances, then, distinctions between morality and ethics or homologous

terms become entangled in such conflicts. This can also be framed as a hierarchical distinction between those who “just follow” conventional morality (or break it in simple ways) and those with a reflexive, more complex ethical life.¹¹ The ways in which these distinctions and societal hierarchies and differentiations are situationally assembled and resonate with more structural hierarchies are certainly worth exploring further (see Reznikova in this volume).

And lastly, in this context: How do the city and concepts of the urban figure in these ethical negotiations? What difference does urbanity make in negotiating and enacting ethics? The chapters will take different approaches to answering these questions. In a general sense, the “urban” in urban ethics can be conceptualized in three different ways: First (a), urban ethics can be understood as a matter of ethics “in the city.” This means treating the city as a backdrop for ethical experiences and negotiations. Or it can be understood (b) as ethics “under urban conditions”: In a long tradition of urban and anti-urban discourses, aspects of anonymity, heterogeneity and population density, for example, have been treated as detrimental to ethical motivations and behavior, but they have also been seen as conducive to a more reflexive distance from conventional moralities. This again illustrates the fundamental entanglement of ethics and the urban and of urban ethics and relationships of power. In a third (c), and, in our view, quite important sense, “urban ethics” refers to the ethics of “the urban,” of urbanism, urbanity or *Urbanität* (see Baumeister and Lafi in this volume), that is, to ethical postulations according to which people “should be urban and make use of the potentials that are specific to cities” and, thus, to urbanism. These views of what it means to be emphatically urban, of how “truly” urban lives are to be lived, have frequently had a strong normative side. Some of them privilege the educated, the rich and/or the “civilized,” particularly when ideals of urbanity and modernity are articulated (see Habit and Strutz/Neumann in this volume), such as in colonial and quasi- and postcolonial situations. Other “urban-ethical projects,” however, attempt to use the potentials of the city and, for more subversive, even counter-hegemonic, purposes, for example, in the sense of the *Situationist International* in Europe in the 1950s and their successors (Debord 1972; Stracey 2014), or in those explored by Henrietta Moore’s chapter on African cities today. In that sense, urban ethics function not only as ways of negotiating and settling conflicts in urban settings, but they also take issue with urban conditions. Urban ethics can be employed to create a discursive space in which the potentials and restrictions of urban life are debated and challenged practically and in which creativity in shaping the social and spatial fabric of cities becomes possible.

Overview of the chapters

The chapters in the book come from two different contexts. Seven of them stem from the first three years of work of the interdisciplinary research group “Urban ethics. Conflicts over the ‘good’ and ‘proper’ conduct of life

in 20th and 21st century cities” funded by the German Research Foundation (2015–2017;¹² second installment 2018–2021), based at universities in Munich, Göttingen and Regensburg (Strutz/Neumann, Habit, Fischer, Ott, Gozzer, Busenkell and Reznikova), of which the authors of this introduction are members as well. The other nine contributions come from international experts who work in similar fields and geographic areas (Moore, Färber, Baumeister, Lafi, Doucet, Sze, Florea/Gagy/Jacobsson, Bikbov and Susser); their perspectives implicitly and explicitly challenge and add to the “urban ethics” approach, while, of course, also presenting these authors’ research independently of it.

The book is divided into five sections. In the *first*, in this introduction and the chapters by Henrietta Moore and Alexa Färber, concepts and theories of urban ethics and normativity take center stage. Building on her seminal work on the ethical imagination, Moore’s article explores evocations of the good life in the city and the complexities of ethicization on different levels, for the middle-class and the poor, in cities such as Nairobi, combining an overview of urban-ethical projects of various types with reflections on the promises of the urban in a wider sense, stressing that the ethical imagination is also a form of creativity, social diagnostics and world-building. Promises – the promise of the city and promises in more specific urban situations – are also the focus of Färber’s reflections. Observing that collaborative projects of various kinds, including those in academic research and the arts, come with a series of such promises, Färber uses snapshots from fieldwork in Hamburg, Germany, to decipher the forms of these communicative acts and their ethical force.

The *second section* encompasses five historically oriented studies that explore specific configurations of ethics, urbanity and conflicts, taking methodological approaches that reach from intellectual history to historical anthropology and architectural criticism. Mediterranean urbanity, as Martin Baumeister argues in his chapter, is a protean concept that haunts normative discourses of Western urbanity and has long been crucial for wider discourses of identity and alterity. He focuses particularly on the ethical implications of Mediterranean urbanity in writers like Lefebvre and more recent Southern European “militant Mediterraneanists” who construct a distinctive, transhistorical Mediterranean urban ethic. This view, as Baumeister argues, often overlooks actual historical developments and seldom manages to avoid the dangers of conceptual essentialism, of reifying ethics. A distinct ethic of urbanity is also at the heart of Nora Lafi’s chapter on cities of the Arab world, particularly Aleppo, Cairo and Tunis, from medieval times to the 19th century. The main focus of Lafi’s extensive work with primary sources are the “Hisba” treatises for the regulation of markets, which provided possibilities for ethical negotiations and moral economies in a context of Islamic theology, societal heterogeneity and, as time went on, Ottoman Imperial rule. Under European colonialism, these kinds of negotiation and, thereby, a long-standing ethic of urbanity were cut off, so that the reconstruction of this urban ethic also challenges Eurocentric accounts of

urban history and of the role of ethics in cities in a more general sense. Geographically and historically bordering on Lafi's work, Julia Strutz and Christoph K. Neumann, in their research on the uses of the Byzantine land wall in late- and post-Ottoman Istanbul, are, however, less interested in positive ethical prescriptions for urban life, but more interested in narratives of *immoral* landscapes, on a discourse-analytical and micro-historical level. Strutz and Neumann ask what these discourses reveal about the (shifting) constructions of "ethical subjects" of modern Istanbul, their national, religious and urban reference points – and about the violence against marginalized urban dwellers who are considered "bad" and "immoral" in that context. The section continues with another study of an urban area in (post-Ottoman) Southeastern Europe, Daniel Habit's chapter on the "Centrul Vechi," the old town in Bucharest, and the moral valuations as a "good" or "bad" space that it was given by different actors, especially after World War II, when the legitimacy of feudal and national histories shifted quickly and the discrepancies between official socialist ethics and the realities of material lack and black markets dominated urban dwellers' lived experience. Using a variety of sources, including oral histories and participant observation, Habit also shows how recent urban activism and the work of NGOs intervene in a situation dominated by fast gentrification and displacement, as well as weak urban planning institutions after the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime, thereby situating recent ethicizations in a broader historical narrative. Isabelle Doucet's contribution, which concludes this section and leads into the next one, focuses on the genealogy and the contentious politics of post-modern, neo-traditionalist architecture and planning in Western Europe since the 1960s. Rooted in urban activism and the critique of the demolition of historic neighborhoods and functionalist worldviews, these tendencies in architecture are often seen as promoting a particularly ethical, "livable" and also democratic form of urbanism. Over the years, they have provoked harsh criticism from different quarters as well, as Doucet illustrates in her reflections and through an interview and discussion with a main protagonist of the "Reconstruction of the City" paradigm, Maurice Culot, and his early work in Brussels. The chapter and interview historicize this overall program of urban reconstruction, which surfaces in other contributions to this volume as well, and highlight its shifting political ambiguities.

In *Section three*, the case studies are primarily contemporary and revolve around a common topic, the area of building and dwelling, a major arena of conflicts and negotiations in cities today. In doing so, they, too, stress the ethical implications and functions of architecture (Harries 1996). The first two of them take a closer, critical look at housing in sought-after cities. They are about urban-ethical projects in the sense outlined above, about construction projects that promise fairer, more neighborly, more communal, but still "urban" and "diverse," rather than financially and culturally exclusive ways of living. More concretely put, Max Ott's and Laura Gozzer's chapters portray recent housing projects in German cities in which, broadly speaking,

middle-class residents try to bypass the regular housing market and institute new “moral economies”: A site of self-organized, collective housing in Berlin in Ott’s case, legitimized partly through the “creative city” discourse, and a new wave of housing cooperatives in Munich in Gozzer’s. In these studies, both of which are based, among other sources, on interviews, we are introduced to the cooperative members and architects’ self-professed ethical motivations and to ambiguities that a more structural view reveals. However, in different ways, both authors suggest that it would be too easy to seek the truth of these projects in “real” materialist strategies “behind” ethical rhetoric. Ott, an architect, puts particular emphasis on the role of space and materiality in social creativity, whereas Gozzer, a cultural anthropologist, stresses particularly the confluence of the ethical and the political in participants’ narrations. The approach taken in the subsequent chapter by sociologists Ioana Florea, Agnes Gagy and Kerstin Jacobsson is quite different, more strongly oriented on the macro and meso levels, and situates ethical projects more systematically in a political-economic context. Here, we return to Bucharest, which in the study is compared to Budapest. Recent waves of financialization have affected the housing markets in these two cities quite differently; interclass alliances and practices of solidarity within social movements antagonistic to the status quo also take divergent paths, partly due to their entanglement with political actors, as the analysis of these local “fields of contention” shows. The last chapter of this section takes us to Singapore. Like in the Berlin study, the focus here is on construction projects for a “creative city” but under very different parameters. Michaela Busenkell, also an architect, investigates the forms and politics of large-scale, city-initiated cultural buildings that were meant, from their inception in the 1990s on, to foster an audience with broad cultural interests that will ultimately, in the government’s view, contribute to a more service and creative sector driven economy. In that context, prescriptions for the “good” and “right” way of living in the city take shape as technologies of governance and subjectivation. They also, however, surface in debates about local or regional aesthetics, in architects’ professional practice, and through public contestations of “good” architecture that can articulate with broader political challenges as well as with a paternalistic recuperation of these challenges by the state.

Section four is dedicated to the ways in which the global concern with urban sustainability, surely one of the most pressing issues of our time, becomes entangled with problematic forms of ethical self-fashioning in the context of specific types of urban-ethical projects and may, thus, undermine its own goals. Julie Sze draws on her research in Shanghai and New York City to argue that “sustainability” has become a “plastic word” and that a spectacle of sustainability, especially in the context of larger-scale development projects, in many cases adorns upper-class lifestyles. It produces commodities that satisfy subjects’ “eco-desire,” rather than truly confronting accelerating ecological collapse. In contrast to these capitalist dynamics, she calls for an “ethical and justice-oriented urban sustainabilities framework”

and a different imagination of temporality that she sees foreshadowed in the work of some of the local organizations and coalitions in her Brooklyn case study. Jeannine-Madeleine Fischer's Auckland-based case study starts with the similar observation that desires for ethically better, more ecological ways of living in the city are widespread. City administrations' "ethical projects," in this case for better recycling schemes, are part of transnational policy exchanges and compacts. They make wide-ranging promises, but on the ground, a basically neoliberal institutional setup that relies on active local citizens' self-organization, as Fischer shows, on the one hand, contributes to changing the semantics of waste and strengthens an ethics of care that is social and environmental but, on the other hand, also reinforces informal and material hierarchies between "good" and "bad" neighborhoods and urban dwellers, and, in some ways, aggravates, rather than alleviates, environmental and social injustice.

Section five moves on to the world of activism, protest and urban social movements. Their relationship to urban ethics as they have been discussed so far is complex: On the one hand, collective agents of urban change also often formulate visions of better, more just cities and they "prefigure" new forms of living in and making use of the city, be it in earnest or playful ways. The "right to the city" is a genuinely political demand, but it also clearly has an ethical dimension. On the other hand, the antagonistic or agonistic character of such movements can also be seen as pointing "beyond" the consensus-oriented dynamics of many late-modern "ethical projects," and it can be argued that this has increasingly been the case in the context of square-occupation protests since 2011. Again, the chapters confront such diagnoses of political situations on a larger level regarding the specific case studies of movements with their complex histories, dynamics and contradictions. Two of them focus on Moscow, a context of an authoritarian state and relatively new movements toward electoral democracy and the empowerment of local citizenry. Both chapters, however, take a cautiously pessimistic view of what has become of these movements' transformative potentials over the last few years. Alexander Bikbov places the emergence of protests against different kinds of construction projects in the context of Muscovites' self-understanding as owner-citizens that is encouraged through different types of "ethical" participation schemes introduced by the city government. A similar ethic of ownership and "civilized" metropolitan respectability, he argues, also structured anti-government protests and prevented their radicalization. Based on a long-term ethnographic study of one particular protest aimed at stopping the construction of a church in a local park, Olga Reznikova describes processes of political and ethical negotiation on the ground and situates them in the wider context of struggles over space, power, secularity and the meanings of the political. Discovering their common ownership of spaces like this park, she argues, protesters performatively create new public spaces that can be starting points for broader emancipatory processes. At the same time, her research also illustrates quite graphically that the emphasis

on a “good city” for people with “local roots” merges in many cases with exclusivist notions of legitimate belonging that theorists of open cities and movements for antiracist justice would have good reasons to reject. Such ambiguities and problems are also at the heart of Ida Susser’s directly-from-the-field reflections on the protest by the “Gilet Jaunes” (Yellow Vests) in France, particularly in Paris. Susser, who has studied urban protest movements and processes of commoning ethnographically over four decades, argues that these protests are part of the formation of a new sociopolitical formation, a class, in E.P. Thompson’s sense of the term, that is not adequately captured by current terms such as “precariat” or “multitude.” Reclaiming the right to state-organized social support and protection is one of the movement’s central overall themes. At this point in time, however, the political alliances that this movement will form with the conventional political Left and Right, as well as with other movements, are still far from clear. The same is true regarding the Gilet Jaunes’ attitudes to questions of migration and diversity and to environmental policy, especially within a context of political populism where “anti-moralists” of different stripes seem ready to make common cause. Clearly, the Gilets Jaunes are one example of a movement that challenges a type of urban thought and practice centered around questions of a “good life in the city” and incremental “ethical projects.” At the same time, in doing so, with all their contradictions, they also expand and newly pose the question of urban ethics by asking very bluntly what a more just city and a more just relationship between a capital and the rest of a country would look like, and by making strong demands. The contours of urban ethics and their relationship to politics in different senses of the term are constantly shifting, but ethical problematizations of urban life will surely not go away in the foreseeable future.

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Notes

- 1 Munich has a recent history of other “ethical” acts that is worth remembering in this context: In 1992, 400,000 people took to the streets and lit candles in an act of protest against a wave of right-wing anti-immigrant violence that swept

- the country at the time (and was seen mostly as taking place outside the city, especially in East Germany); the Munich *Lichterkette* (chain of lights) became the iconic case of liberal (rather than more radical anti-fascist) protest.
- 2 Surely, similar, less publicized events took place in many locations: In Turkey, on Greek and Italian islands, along the so-called Balkan route, and in many towns, small communities and large cities all over.
 - 3 A detail that Sennett mentions as strikingly ethical, though hardly a typical one, is people leaving packages of gifts on tables in order to avoid the situation where donors would play a role of benefactors.
 - 4 In that context, a “good” city must also be taken to be an emphatically “urban” city, in the sense of accepting and embracing difference (Moser 2018).
 - 5 For critical reviews of ethical turns, see Badiou (2012a); Bogner (2011); Fassin (2012b); Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz (2000); Holbraad (2018); Luhmann (2008b); Mouffe (2005); Rancière (2006).
 - 6 Mostafavi, whose volume on *Ethics of the Urban* is highly relevant to this discussion, suggests that urban-ethical interventions are limited in their scope because of the difficulties of more systemic political interventions under current circumstances: “In the absence of a holistic and integrated approach, what remains is the tactical and the strategic, which can at least demonstrate a fragment of what is possible now” (Mostafavi 2017a, 11). While his focus is on urban design and planning projects, similar logics are at play in urban-ethical projects in other fields as well. Overall, Mostafavi argues for urbanistic projects (design, architecture, planning) that are both emphatically “ethical,” which he defines as based on values such as justice, that is, in a slightly different and less sociological sense than we do, and “agonistic,” open to conflicts among participants but, out of necessity, somewhat distant from broader political plans and a logic of antagonism. This is a productive position in many ways, especially given the actual need for all sorts of practical interventions (see also Kaltsa 2019), but it runs the risk of underestimating the force of neoliberal logics and a type of “passive revolution” recuperation within processes of ethicization and the framework of ethics. It also too easily identifies, in our view, interventions that are ultimately still led by expert professionals with views of politics and the political such as those advocated by Mouffe (2005), Badiou (2012b) or Rancière (2006) and downplays the friction between these positions. Reflections on the potentials of “ethical” architectural and planning projects and procedures and their challenges to older models of architecture also predominate in *Urban Ethics under Conditions of Crisis* (Moraitis/Rassia 2019), an edited volume that was published briefly before this book went to press.
 - 7 Theorists of contemporary governmentality see such projects as intrinsically linked with ethics because they concern the ways in which individuals approach, direct, stylize and conduct their own lives (on “ethopower” see Rose 2000; for a slightly different but relevant approach, see Clarke 2013), their “work” on the self (ethics in Foucault’s sense), and governmental “conduct of conduct.”
 - 8 It may well be that using concepts and theory in this way is part of the disciplinary baggage that comes with ethnology (roughly, sociocultural anthropology) and cultural studies.
 - 9 This, however, also raises a series of theoretical and methodological questions when it comes to how ethics and its subjects are imagined, and requires further conceptual and empirical work, as quite obviously notions of distributed agency complicate anthropocentric theories of ethics.
 - 10 Sayer (2011, 17). See also Laidlaw (2014, 4); Sayer quips that speaking about ethics in academic circles just “goes down much better” than using the term “morality.” The relative and contextual nature of these distinctions is also exemplified by Koutsoumpos (2019), who uses “urban ethics” to refer to habituated

senses of the good and bad – and “urban morality” for rule-based, discursive, rational approaches embodied in, for example, top-down urban planning. This is in important ways different from how the terms are used here, but, as Sayer would put it, it also “makes sense” and enables important analytical work, in that case in urban planning history and theory. In theoretical terms, it should also be pointed out that ethics (and morality) cannot be understood as a societal “system” or “domain,” such as politics or law, as sociologists as diverse as Fassin and Luhman have stressed (Fassin 2012b, 15; Luhmann 2008a).

- 11 The focus on ethics in this particular sense has been theorized extensively by sociologists of reflexive modernization and “life politics” since the 1980s who have strongly contributed to that hierarchization as well (Beck et al. 1994).
- 12 Project number DFG-FOR 2101; the Berlin and Singapore projects were associated with the group. On the overall approach (see also Dürr et al. 2020; Ege/Moser 2017).

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