

## Cities: A Philosophical Inquiry

Frank Cunningham

An earlier version of this paper was prepared for talks at Ritsumeikan University (Division of Social Sciences), Kyoto, May 24, 2007, and Nihon University (Department of Philosophy), Tokyo, June 18, 2007.

### 1. *A world of cities*

Two years ago, the distribution of the world's people reached the point at which over half now live in cities. Some social scientists and urban planners (but few political leaders other than those of large municipalities) had seen this change coming. With one group of exceptions, philosophers have paid less attention to the subject. I would like to advance some ideas about how to think philosophically about cities, drawing upon North American and European thinkers and traditions.

A starting place is suggested by Immanuel Kant, for whom the three major questions of philosophy generally are: What can I know? What should I do? For what may I hope? Urban philosophy might be organized around three similar questions: What is a city? What is a good city? What is the ideal city?

### 2. *Utopianism*

The last question is one utopian philosophers try to answer. The utopians were the exceptional group of philosophers who addressed cities. A brief summary will help illustrate how urban utopianism, which began with Plato and became prominent from the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, has influenced modern urban planning.

The term "utopia" literally means "nowhere" and was first used by the English theorist Thomas More in his book, *Utopia* (1515). People in More's Utopia lead simple lives and wear plain clothing. There is an emphasis on cleanliness, health, and music. Private property has been abolished, and there is a six-hour work day. Like most early utopians, More did not support democracy, but "meritocracy," that is, a society gov-

erned by the wisest and most able, whom he called Syphogrants.

The utopian society of *New Atlantis*, described by Francis Bacon in 1622, shared many of the characteristics of More's Utopia, although Bacon devoted much attention to the structure and role of families and projected a major function for technology and science. For instance, he recommended putting elderly people in 600-fathom-deep caves in a state of suspended animation until chemicals to prolong life were discovered.

Around the same time in Spain, Thomas Campanella published *The City of the Sun*. In addition to abolishing property and having a four-hour work day, Campanella called for complete equality of the sexes, although he also wanted the leaders of his city to "distribute male and female breeders of the best natures according to philosophical rules." (This was easy for Campanella, a celibate monk, to recommend.)

The French utopian Charles Fourier (1772-1837) has probably had the greatest influence on urban thinking. His utopian city, which he called a "Phalanstery," was composed of 300 families of five members each. Though the families had their own living units, they cooked in communal kitchens and dined together. The economic and social principles of this utopia were based on what Fourier took to be the basic emotions, which are: the need for change and variety, the love of intrigue and envy, and what he called the "composite" pleasure of uniting mind and body. Fourier thought that the need for variety would be satisfied by people taking turns doing different kinds of work and that envy could be harnessed to promote productive economic competition. The union of mind and body was achieved in early edu-



Lewis Mumford, writing about the Unité d'Habitation in *The New Yorker*, charged Corbusier with megalomania of the sort that had motivated construction of the Egyptian pyramids: “the architect of Unity House seeks with violence to accommodate human beings to the inflexible dimension of his monumental edifice” (October 5, 1957).

Drawing on a categorization by urban theorist Douglas Kelbaugh, three main reactions to utopian urban thought may be identified: the New Urbanism movement, what Kelbaugh calls “everyday urbanism,” and “post urbanism.” New Urbanists localize and moderate the utopianism of Howard, seeing his garden cities mainly as suburban living centres, without Howard’s effort to make them self-contained. Seaside, Florida, designed by the firm Duany Plater-Zyberk, is the most widely publicized example.

Everyday urbanism is a form of populist anti-utopianism whose best-known representative is the late Jane Jacobs. Her attack on the practices of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century urban planning, *The Death and Life of American Cities*, was written with her native New York in mind and she subsequently led urban campaigns in her adopted home of Toronto. For her, the heart of a city resides in its neighbourhoods, which have evolved in response to the needs and wishes of the people who live and work in them. Decisions about urban design and regulations should accommodate local traditions and democratically include participation of affected citizens, thereby respecting urban patterns that people have already created for themselves.

Rem Koolhaas, director of the Office for Municipal Architecture in New York, represents the post-urbanist reaction. He does not share Jacobs’s concern with everyday life in neighbourhoods, and he endorses revolutionary urban architectural ventures, which, he thinks cannot realistically be centrally planned, but should respond to market forces. His *Delirious New York* celebrates the results that he believes are exemplified by that city. In virtue of the prominent place he gives to economic markets, his version of anti-utopian may be thought of as libertarian.

Kelbaugh endorses new urbanism, while both seeing complementary virtues in everyday and post urbanist thought and acknowledging problems with each approach (*Repairing the American Metropolis*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2002). Localized utopias of the new urbanists can become sterile and isolated middle-class enclaves. Critics see it as no accident that Seaside, Florida, provided the set for the dystopic town in the movie *The Truman Show*. Neither Jacobs nor Koolhaas rejects all planning, but it is not clear what

constraints on citizen preferences and economic markets should be. To prevent populace-driven city evolution from turning on itself, urban citizens must be informed by appropriate values. If it proves profitable, market forces can lead to stultifying homogeneity or encourage mega-projects destructive of neighbourhoods and local commerce – the monumentalism of which Mumford complained.

## 5. A pragmatic approach

Utopian-inspired approaches to cities and their critics start with the question “What is an ideal city?” The utopians recommend ideal cities based on principles of rational order, while critics propose alternatives. Those who see merit both in utopian visions and in the critics’ charges and who find something incomplete or otherwise unsatisfying in the main alternatives might look for another point of departure.

Urban planners and social scientists tend to start with the more modest question, “What is a good city?” The effort is to describe what Kevin Lynch called “good city form” in a book of this title, where actual cities are the subject matter, and deficiencies in them can be remedied by urban planning and design. This is an apt policy orientation, but not sufficient for philosophers, who will want to know the normative principles distinguishing good city form from bad.

The remaining perspective starts with the question “What is a city?” “What” questions are the most philosophically difficult ones to ask about any subject – think of Plato’s opening question in *The Republic*, “What is justice?” which initiated a debate carried on to this day. The situation is similar for cities. Few urban theorists venture definitions. Those who do seldom get beyond describing cities as built forms for living and working, and the only uncontested but uninformative specific difference offered is that they are “large scale.” The partial definition I shall suggest – recognizing that it is contestable – is generated by thinking of cities in the manner of the philosophical Pragmatists, especially John Dewey.

For Pragmatists, life is a matter of ongoing problem solving. This is true for individuals, for instance, in confronting obstacles to the satisfaction of daily needs or achieving career goals. In the social and political realm, Dewey was most concerned with how “publics” confront their problems. In his 1927 tract, *The Public and its Problems*, he describes a public as any large-scale constellation of people whose actions mutually affect one another over protracted periods of time. States are obvious examples, but so are global regions or cities. Publics face problems common to all their members,

ranging from meeting subsistence needs to the provision of cultural amenities or the use of sophisticated technology. Publics are not homogenous and may include groups with conflicting interests, but the problems they face are common to all their members, and they call for collective action.

The notion of a city as a public faced with problems specific to itself, offers a point of reference for an urban philosophy, beginning with a conception of the city as *an urban public confronting persisting daily problems of dwelling, work, and leisure, the solutions to which extend beyond custom and face-to-face negotiation.*

That the persisting problems facing an urban public are daily ones differentiates it from a regional or national public. That solutions to the problems cannot be solved by appeal to custom or direct negotiation differentiates the city from a village. The problems include such things as provision of water, power, transportation, waste removal and sanitation, health-care, law enforcement, jobs, education, facilities for recreation, and the protection of public and private spaces.

Such problems call for solution by urban professionals (planners, architects, engineers), researchers (such as urban geographers and sociologists), and politicians. A Pragmatic approach sees a need for interaction and cooperation among people from all these categories (something unfortunately rarely achieved). Also, like Jane Jacobs, who placed herself within the tradition of philosophical Pragmatism, this approach requires that ordinary urban citizens participate in the solutions to urban problems.

Here are some examples of large-scale (or “macro”) urban problematics.

## 6. Urban Macro Problematics

### Steering vs. Accommodation

The sustenance and growth of cities require steering (that is, planning), but cities are inhabited by people with established patterns of life and work that planners must accommodate, unless they are to abuse the very citizens whose lives they are charged with improving.

### Environmentalism vs. Urban Chaos

Cities are built environments located within natural environments on which they can have detrimental effects (such as air and water pollution). Environmental problems must be addressed on a large scale, taking account of the way that all aspects of a natural and built environment interact. However, in the flux of urban life and work there is an element of unpredictability (chaos)

that does not permit their being understood or manipulated in a systematic way.

### Diversity vs. Auto-Ghettoization

The cultural life of cities is made vibrant by multiculturalism (among other diversities), but in the interests of preserving their unique cultures, there is a tendency for ethnic groups to localize (ghettoize) themselves in sectors of a city, cutting themselves off from other parts of the population and diminishing the interactions required if multiculturalism is to enliven the city.

### Creative Cities vs. Golden DisneyWorlds

Large cities, at least those in North America have been presenting themselves as “world-class” in an effort to attract business and tourism. In keeping with the advice of American urbanist Richard Florida (now at the University of Toronto), many cities try to attract members of the “creative class,” such as entrepreneurs and artists, to their city cores. The problem is that when this effort succeeds, the costs of housing, restaurants, and shops in the city centres increase, displacing indigenous inhabitants and making the cities less interesting places, filled with expensive, homogenous cultural and commercial enterprises.

### Communities vs. Anonymity

Dewey emphasized that in order for publics effectively to address problems, they must recognize themselves as publics. This both requires and breeds a certain sort of community. However, in cities, unlike villages, most people are anonymous to one another, and anonymity is not conducive to community sentiment.

### Local vs. Global

Cities are themselves located within larger regions, including other cities and rural environments. This becomes problematic when the global needs of cities or city-regions conflict, as they often do, with local needs. For example, to prevent urban sprawl, housing must be intensified within cities, but this creates crowding which many residents resist, in the same way that neighbourhoods resist the disruption of the improved transit systems required by the cities and their regions.

## 7. Walter Benjamin's contribution

To help answer the question “What is a city?” I shall follow several other recent urban theorists by turning to the ideas of Walter Benjamin. While living in Paris between the First and Second World Wars, Benjamin began to think about the nature of cities and struck upon the idea of writing a book, departing from

an aspect of Paris that he, like Charles Baudelaire, Louis Aragon, and other writers at the time found especially intriguing – namely, the “*passages*” or arcades running between some of the major streets. In 1928 he sent a prospectus to his senior colleagues in Germany, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who replied that the idea was without philosophical merit. Benjamin’s reaction was to write an 800-page manuscript on the topic called (in English) *The Paris Arcades Project*.

Many of the arcades, which were built in the 1820s, were destroyed to make way for the grand boulevards built by Napoléon III’s urban architect, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussman, but several remain. In the arcades, Benjamin saw elements that ran counter to utopian thinking, but also elements that accorded with it.

In the background of Benjamin’s thinking were the views of contemporary German sociologists, such as Ferdinand Tönnies, who viewed the growth of modern metropolises with alarm for destroying the security of small-town community life by making people anonymous to one another. Against them stood the minority voice of Georg Simmel, who saw nothing wrong with urban anonymity, which freed people from the weight of tradition and intrusive public scrutiny, thus contributing to the vitality of cities.

Benjamin’s endorsement of this view is seen in his celebration of the “*flâneur*.” Literally, this translates as a “loiterer,” but Benjamin meant it to refer to someone who, with no particular purpose in mind “walks long and aimlessly,” his daydreams prompted by the sights and sounds of the city. (It must be “his.” A woman could not be a “*flâneuse*,” as she would be mistaken for a prostitute.)

Celebration of the *flâneur* does not fit well with utopian cities, where everything must have a rational purpose, nor with the anti-traditionalism of the utopians and anarchists, who wanted to break with the past. Benjamin saw Haussmann’s destruction of Parisian neighbourhoods as an expression of this sentiment, although as servant of a dictatorial regime, Haussmann was not an ally especially of the anarchists.

Benjamin appreciated the arcades that survived Haussmann’s destruction. Some Surrealists also liked the arcades, which they saw as passageways to Paris’s pastoral history. This fit in with the element of utopian thinking that lamented the alienation of cities from nature. Benjamin, however, saw the arcades as forward-looking. He describes the arcades as “glass and iron before their time”: it was not until the 1850s and later that the Gare de l’Est, Les Grandes Halles, and the London Exhibition were built using the same techniques.

Benjamin also saw the arcades as public places for ordinary people, working-class analogues of the “drawing rooms of the bourgeoisie.” They played a role similar to the common spaces Campanella described in *The City of the Sun* or Fourier in his Phalansteries. At the same time, however, the Paris arcades promoted consumerism. The arcades can be seen as the first shopping malls – a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century development that would have alarmed Benjamin. In the arcades, he wrote, “resides the last dinosaur of Europe, the consumer.” That many of the shops in the arcades sold stylish clothing also drew Benjamin’s criticism, since he considered the fixation on fashion as a form of “death and hell” (endless unsatisfied desire).

## 8. What is a Good City?

The implications of Benjamin’s views and their relation to a pragmatic conception of cities and their problems will become clearer as we return to the “What is a good city?” question. To this end, three kinds of conceptual tools will be employed:

- Relating urban coherence (Jerusalem) and incoherence (Babylon)
- Distinguishing between walls and borders
- Motivating appropriate civic virtues

### Coherence and Incoherence

In urban mythology, Jerusalem, the divinely unified city, is typically contrasted with Babylon, the chaotic or morally and culturally incoherent city. While not all utopians give religion a prominent place (though most of the classic ones did), they agree that the ideal city should be a place of principled order, and in this respect Jerusalem-like. (Of course, the real Jerusalem has always been a site of conflict, while Babylon was the home of the Code of Hammurabi, a paradigm of legal orderliness.)

Not all theorists of cities, however, agree that unified orderliness is an essential mark of the good city. Aristotle expressed a contrary view:

It is indeed evident that as a polis tends to become more a unity, it eventually ceases to be a polis; for a polis is by its nature a plurality of a certain sort ... what is said to be the greatest good of a polis [unity] is really the ruin of that polis (*Politics*, Beta 2).

Benjamin’s conclusion of the study he prepared for the *Arcades Project* suggests where he stands on this question:

These notes devoted to the Paris arcades were begun under an open sky of cloudless blue that arched above the foliage and yet was dimmed by the mil-

lions of leaves from which the fresh breeze of diligence, the stertorous breath of research, the storm of youthful zeal, and the idle wind of curiosity have raised the dust of centuries. The painted sky of summer that looks down from the arcades in the reading room of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has stretched its dreamy, unlit ceiling over the birth of their insight. And when that sky opened to the eyes of this young insight, there in the foreground were standing not the divinities of Olympus—not Zeus, Hephaestus, Hermes, or Hera, Artemis, and Athena—but the Dioscori. (*The Arcades Project*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 884.)

The Dioscori, according to Greek mythology, were the twin sons of Leda: one – Castor – fathered by a mortal; the other – Pollux – fathered by Zeus. This, I take it, is the mix of coherence and incoherence (Jerusalem and Babylon) that Benjamin saw and favoured in cities – about ¼ coherence to ¾ incoherence. Like Aristotle, he rejects the idea that cities are or should be completely unified, but he does not want to leave order out of account either.

Cities both contain and constitute communities, but they are places where anonymity is both prevalent and accepted. They are, so to speak, safe for the *flâneur*. Cities have traditions unique to them – what Benjamin called their “auras” – but they also facilitate and demand innovation. A city that was entirely coherent would be frozen or dead, a homogenous unity instead of the multiplicity that Aristotle identified as essential to cities. Moreover, the coherent and the incoherent dimensions of cities have undesirable economic, cultural, and political characteristics as well, as the table above shows.

Countering stultification, closeness, and conservatism in a society where tradition and community overwhelm innovation and anonymity is difficult, if not impossible. By contrast, favouring a city that is partly incoherent is not to invite consumerism, anomie, apathy, or self-centredness, but to see these as capable of being tempered by appeals to tradition and community even while anonymity is protected and innovation encouraged.

**Walls and Borders**

In his book, *The Conscience of the Eye* (which criticizes the religious conception of cities inspired by

St. Augustine, thus favouring the “Babylon” side of urban thinking), Richard Sennett makes an insightful distinction between borders and walls:

[I propose a] form for time in space, which I shall call narrative space.... Spaces can become full of time when they permit certain properties of narratives to operate in everyday life.... To permit space to become... encoded with time, the urbanist has to design weak borders rather than strong walls. (*The Conscience of the Eye*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1990, p. 190.)

This takes us back to the utopians’ affinity for walled cities. Walls and borders demarcate spaces – residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, public, and private. However, unlike walls, borders are permeable and changeable. Both define spaces appropriate for unique uses, which may change over time. But walls make interactions with adjoining spaces difficult. The configuration and locations of boundaries allow for experimental change, while walls are either permanent or require physical destruction. Boundaries are thus both confining and enabling, while walls are just confining.

The arcades, to return to Benjamin, are not walls, but passages between streets which, were it not for the arcades, would be blocked

off from each other by solid rows of buildings along them. Like the shopping malls of today, space configurations in arcades are easily converted from one use to another. (Referring to buildings like the Athletic Club in Manhattan, Koohaas saw the same potential vertically in highrise towers, if appropriately designed.)

Classic utopians interpret walls symbolically as principles of ordered urban societies. Walls are more than physical structures, and the utopians attended to social divisions among people within the physical walls that surrounded their cities. Campanella wanted people in his cities to break down gender barriers, and Fourier sought to overcome fixed divisions of labour. In these respects, the utopians had broader visions than urban planners, who focus primarily on physical structures. Built form, such as demographically and economically mixed housing complexes, can certainly play a role in addressing racial, economic, and other divisions, but cannot solve all urban problems. Political, economic, and cultural campaigns to promote inclusive democratic

**Coherence and Incoherence**

Coherence means...	Incoherence means...
Community	Anonymity
Tradition	Innovation
<b>But also...</b>	
Stultification	Consumerism
Closedness	Anomie
Conservatism	Apathy / self-centredness

practices, social justice, and toleration are also required to dismantle extra-physical walls within cities.

Similarly, Sennett's distinction applies to urban cultures in the narrow sense of the term (music, theatre, sports, cinema, museums). The Creative City vs. Golden DisneyWorld problematic, for instance, is exacerbated by cultural walls separating popular culture from "high" culture with a bias toward the latter, on the one hand, and impediments, mainly in the form of expense, to access to cultural facilities and education, on the other. One effect of such walls is to cut off the cultural vibrancy of creative cities from their popular and urban-unique sources. Another is to make cities dependent upon private-sector donations, with resulting biases in the nature of cultural amenities available in a city.

### Civic Virtues

Like any other public in Dewey's sense, an urban public cannot identify, let alone address common problems, if all that holds it together is self-interest. Cooperation in the confrontation of problems is essential, but entirely self-interested individuals cannot trust one another not to defect from joint actions if they believe there is an advantage to them to do so, or even if they think others may see such an advantage (this is at the heart of the famous "Prisoners' Dilemma" problem in social choice theory). But if a city is not rooted in a common tradition, then values appropriate to city life are required that are strong enough to unite a public in common projects while not overwhelming urban diversity. Two of these civic virtues are suggested by the characterization of cities as combining elements of incoherence and coherence. These elements map onto the virtues, respectively, of toleration and concern.

#### Acceptance of incoherence → Toleration

#### Commitment to coherence → Concern

If cities comprise a multiplicity of people exhibiting different lifestyles and values (religious commitments or secular rejection of religion, sexual orientations, modes of child rearing, cultural tastes, forms of recreation, and so on) and these people are mostly anonymous to one another, they must at least be tolerant of each other's differences, rather than seeing such differences as threatening. An ethic of "live and let live" is essential to city life. But if the city is to effectively confront common problems, this ethic cannot become indifference. It must be supplemented by concern, so that people in need are not just tolerated, but actively cared for.

At one time I thought that these were all that is required for civic virtue; however, recognition of the vital role that cities must play in addressing environmental

challenges (they are both causes and victims of world-wide environmental degradation), prompts me to add a third, namely seeing oneself as a trustee of the city in which one resides, as opposed to its exploiter.

#### Concern for the future → Trusteeship

Civic trusteeship involves taking responsibility for the preservation of public places such as parks. It means caring for one's home with an eye to the life of future inhabitants. It means that building projects and architectural design should be informed by an understanding of the open-ended and changing futures of cities and undertaken in such a way as to keep future options open. It means that infrastructural support and future maintenance costs are built into planning and budgeting for development. Promoting a culture of trusteeship is vital for confronting the environmental urban macro-problem, since an ethic incorporating this stance can be integrated into many different cultures without being destructive of them, and in this way is compatible with urban diversity.

### 9. The Urban Problematics

The perspective outlined in this paper does not solve major urban problems, and, like Pragmatism generally and unlike utopianism, suggests that there *are* no complete or permanent solutions to such problems. "Solutions" to big problems can at best remove their most debilitating aspects, making it possible for people to confront their effects. What this or any alternative urban philosophical perspective should do is provide general guidelines for addressing urban problems in specific contexts.

Regarding the macro problem of steering vs. accommodation, for example, the perspective outlined in this paper prescribes a bias toward accommodation. However, accommodating pre-existing urban structures and habits should be undertaken in accord with the virtues of concern, toleration, and trusteeship, which may sometimes dictate a need for central steering.

Similarly, the perspective suggests a presumption for protecting anonymity. Public places like the arcades should be encouraged. Unlike Aristotle, who thought that public places must be dedicated to political debate and discussion and should never be located in market places, the perspective recommends ensuring that places of commerce are also public places. In North America, this includes shopping malls, which in most suburban areas are the only places where people can socially interact with others as much or as little as they please. A constraint on anonymity is that it should be supplemented with educational, cultural-political, and legal

measures to instil in urban citizens the virtues of toleration, concern, and trusteeship.

This same constraint pertains to the problem of auto-ghettoization, which, however it plays out with respect to living places, should be actively resisted in the case of education. That is, this perspective prescribes against religiously based schools or those segregated by class. Achieving this constraint is, of course, especially problematic when neighbourhoods are homogenous (as the experience of bussing in the United States illustrated). Although it is inconsistent with this perspective to impose diversification on neighbourhoods, mixed-class public housing can militate against ghettoization. Where segregation is precipitated by economic disadvantage or by prejudice, weakening non-physical walls within cities can also play a role. So can planning and design based on porous borders. A positive example worth studying in Toronto is the predominance in its south central core by a succession of ethnic groups (East European Jewish, Southern European, Chinese, Vietnamese) which did not impede felicitous group interaction with surrounding communities or within the core in periods of transition.

The macro problem of the local and the global manifests itself (among other ways) in the phenomenon of NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard), as when members of a city neighbourhood unite to block changes that they think would be harmful to them, even if they might be good for the city as a whole. Not infrequently, the charge of NIMBYism is cynically made by private developers and their architects who wish to erect neighbourhood-destructive buildings. In such cases, an “accommodation” bias counsels siding with the neighbours. However, where there is a genuine conflict between neighbourhood protection and a broader civic need, the injunction to avoid walls and to be guided by the civic virtues at least provides guidance.

## 10. How And Who

The utopians never explained how their ideals could be realized. Their task was simply to describe an ideal future. A Pragmatist does not have this luxury. On the question of how urban principles are best put into practice, Pragmatism again parts company with utopianism in avoiding universal models. For example, whether urban development should be primarily left to market forces or be centrally directed is not a matter that can be decided for all possible urban challenges. The best approach or mix of approaches among public works, market interactions, and organized volunteer activity will depend upon the context. Both the utopianism of state planning and that of free-market libertarianism are suspect from the pragmatic point of view. From this perspective, not much more can be said about the “how” question without addressing concrete urban problems in specific settings.

To turn to the “by whom” question, it is easy to say (if not to make actually happen) that those whose professional lives have direct urban bearing should act in accordance with the recommended principles. The city planner, councillor, or mayor who acts only to aggrandize a local constituency (or himself) and who erects divisive and inflexible walls acts to the detriment

of a city just as much as one who, even if inspired by an altruistic vision, tries to force changes on an urban populace. Similarly detrimental is the developer who looks only to profit or the architect whose motive is simply to gain notoriety by creating startling edifices. Just as most doctors have internalized a code of medical ethics, urban professionals should embrace city-friendly principles. This paper has tried to identify a possible list of such principles.



**One of the arcades in Paris, described in the *Arcades Project* by Walter Benjamin**

Furthermore, urban professionals, politicians, and researchers must work in close cooperation with one another and with urban citizens. Though this seems obvious, I note that in my own city and others with which I am acquainted, urban professionals, politicians, and academic researchers typically work isolated from each other, and what citizen consultation there is often enters late in the planning process or is perfunctory.

How about philosophers? They are supposed to be good at developing orientations toward complex and elusive subjects. Philosophers are also supposed to give reasons – in this case to justify a presumption for accommodation, the democratic interaction of professionals and urban residents, or the endorsement of a specific list of civic virtues. Some philosophers have held the

idealistic or egotistical opinion that the reasons they give for something will cause it to happen, but one need not fall victim to this delusion to agree that those pursuing policies based on good reasons will at least have an advantage over those whose policies have no good reasons behind them.

Philosophers also try to indicate when key theoretical decisions must or need not be made; this is part of what is involved in defining a general perspective. If this paper has accomplished nothing else, I hope that it has motivated an orientation on urban theory and practice that, at the most general level, pries these things apart from utopian thinking, but without rejecting all aspects of utopianism either.

**Frank Cunningham** is a professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto and former Principal of the University's Innis College. [frank.cunningham@utoronto.ca](mailto:frank.cunningham@utoronto.ca)

### Recent CUCS Research Bulletins

all Research Bulletins are available at [www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca](http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca)

***Toronto's Little Portugal: A neighbourhood in transition***, C. Teixeira, #35, March 2007

***A revolving door? Homeless people and the justice system in Toronto***, S. Novac, J. Hermer, E. Paradis, and A. Kellen, #36, July 2007

***More sinned against than sinning? Homeless people as victims of crime and harassment***, S. Novac, J. Hermer, E. Paradis, and A. Kellen, #37, July 2007

***A housing system divided: Canada's dualist approach to housing***, J.D. Hulchanski, #38, August 2007.

The Centre for Urban and Community Studies promotes and disseminates multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on urban issues. The Centre contributes to scholarship on questions relating to the social and economic well-being of people who live and work in urban areas large and small, in Canada and around the world.

CUCS Research Bulletins present a summary of the findings and analysis of the work of researchers associated with the Centre. The aim is to disseminate policy relevant findings to a broad audience. The views and interpretations offered by the author(s) do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre or the University.

This Bulletin may be reprinted or distributed, including on the Internet, without permission, provided it is not offered for sale, the content is not altered, and the source is properly credited.

General Editors: L.S. Bourne, P. Campsie, J.D. Hulchanski, P. Landolt, and G. Suttor

#### Centre for Urban and Community Studies

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

455 Spadina Ave, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2G8; fax 416 978-7162

[urban.centre@utoronto.ca](mailto:urban.centre@utoronto.ca) [www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca](http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca)

ISBN-13 978-0-7727-1462-6 © Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto 2007