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The Philosophical Dimensions of Urban Transportation: Introduction

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Geographers, urban planners, and interdisciplinary scholars have made numerous contributions toward understanding urban transportation. Until recently, philosophers have largely neglected the topic, but now transportation is an expanding area of research, most notably in the emerging subfield known as philosophy of the city. This special issue aims to increase philosophical contributions to its study. Those who are working in this area are examining several subjects that were previously ignored. Transportation is one such topic. The articles in this special edition make this claim evident. Philosophy of the city is informed by several other subfields, and these articles on urban mobility make that notion apparent. They rely on insights from other areas of philosophy such as aesthetics, ethics, philosophy of technology, feminist philosophy, and phenomenology.

For example, Samantha Noll and Laci Hubbard-Mattix exhibit how transportation specialists could benefit from looking at mobility issues through a lens of feminist intersectionality. Through identifying this possible avenue, they reveal new ways for thinking about urban transportation that would bolster inclusivity in cities. Similarly, Sana Iqbal employs a phenomenological approach to address how public transport affects women in the city of Karachi through creating the conditions for social exclusion. These insightful papers could well serve transportation planners and engineers who are dealing with mobility issues in urban environments.

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In terms of the future of urban mobility and automated vehicles, Miloš N. Mladenović, Sanna Lehtinen, Emily Soh, Karel Martens deepen our understanding on the complex relationship between everyday aesthetics and urban mobility, examining how we conceptualize and contrast self-driving vehicles in these regards. I investigate the common features of how we argue for automated vehicles, urging us to think about them as parts of a transportation plan instead of the plan for urban mobility. These two papers show how philosophers can engage with emerging topics that will undoubtedly challenge our social structures and mobility systems.

While other areas in the academy have contributions to make in terms of how we learn about urban mobility, philosophical enterprises have a unique orientation that can reveal insights that could be lacking in neighboring fields. For instance, while transportation involves moving about the city, it is also about power. Transportation as power literally gives shape to cities, and it sets the parameters for what people can experience in these places, along with how people have experiences of them. The reach of this power is quite extensive. It touches numerous aspects of people's lives, including employment, commutes, travel, family visits, education, and religious services. If we were to claim that, for some people, mobility is essential for life, then we ought to examine it. The articles in the collection count as modest steps in that direction.