

# **Moving People Into Cities: Are Cities Ethical**

A Research Paper submitted to the Department of Science, Technology and Society

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Engineering and Applied Science  
University of Virginia · Charlottesville, Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Science, School of Engineering

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Spring, 2020

On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid  
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## **Introduction**

Ethics are an important part in determining how a society acts to each other and how they make decisions as a group or by oneself. It is important to consider ethics when moving forward or creating policies, or even when trying to attain a goal. One of the biggest problems we face today as a society is climate change whether or not people want to admit it is real. One consideration is to change the way we develop and rethink how we live. How we layout where we live can change how many emissions we produce. One question that will be explored is should all of the world's population be moved into compact cities that are designed to promote sustainability. Following that question would be, are cities in themselves ethical and would it be ethical to move people into them? Given the growth of urban population is also growing through natural increase and movement from rural areas to urban areas all around the world this seems to be an important question to ask(Satterthwaite, 2010). Two of the ethical frameworks that are going to be used are utilitarianism and egoism. Utilitarianism, which looks at a decision and chooses the outcome that provides the benefit to the most people, was chosen to look at more of a group decision to be made by the world. It is also used to see if the benefits of living in a city would outweigh the costs. This ethical decision would be the clearest to people and therefore the first one to be analyzed. Egoism, which focuses on self interest and doing what is best for yourself, was chosen to see how an individual would view a scenario and choose their option because that is what it really comes down to is how is each individual going to decide and support the decision in a democratic society.

## **Living in Cities?**

When looking for the best possible way to live sustainably most people cite that cities are the best way to live. With well planned out compact living areas, people no longer require a car and instead use public transportation. If a city is planned well, walking and biking can also be considered as suitable modes of transportation. The infrastructure required for cars decreases as more people choose to use other means of transportation and allows for the potential to reclaim the area for parks where kids can play and get in touch with nature(Beatley, 2019). When communities live compactly, children are allowed freedom in a way because they do not have to rely on their parents to drive them places(Beatley, 2019). Kids can use bikes, sidewalks, and public transportation to allow them to visit friends and places they like to play without bothering their parents. It also allows citizens to easily visit the store to buy groceries or other goods(Beatley,2019).

Carbon emissions from cities may be greater than rural areas but that is due to the fact that larger portions of the population live in the area. When looking at per person, carbon emissions are often much lower in cities than in rural cities because of proximity(Steuteville, 2019). Disagreement about the fairness of comparing these measurements is due to the fact that a majority of the food and other products are produced outside the city and transported in(Day, 2016). However, one argument that could be made is that grocery stores provide the same food all around no matter where it is located, but this does not account for the fact that these stores probably do not have to import the same quantity into them as a city grocery stores do and that generally there are more restaurants in these areas. One other consideration when examining this claim would be that is it more efficient for the grocery stores to be located in cities since a lot more people would be living there rather than having to transport it to the spaced out

communities. Though closer to the food source not everyone has their food locally sourced in areas outside the city.

Specialization has led people to separate jobs and production of different goods. If we bring multiple companies into the city then transportation of resources is decreased and the wastes of one company can be used as the products for another(R. McDonald, 2018). The way our communities are set-up will have the most impact on the environment(Penazzi,2019). Living in clustered cities allows for more green areas to surround the cities. Suburbans areas disturb large areas of forests, which sequesters more carbon than the grass that would replace it. If not used for forested areas, living in densely packed areas allows farmers more land to use to grow more food. With a growing population more land will be needed to grow more food no matter how great the technology or processes become to increase productivity. Overall, sustainable living is the key to saving our earth and cities provide a way to keep communities close and an opportunity to reduce the footprint of humanity on the Earth.

### **Moving People to the City: A Utilitarian Approach to Viewing Cities**

Americans have always had a dream of moving out to the country buying their own house with a yard, but with a growing population this idea needs to change. In a recent poll, about 27% to 49% of the people polled wanted to live in rural areas(Ingraham, 2018).With a majority of people wanting to leave it would seem unfair that they would have to be stuck living in the city just looking at this statistic alone. Cities need to become more appealing to the average American so that they will enjoy living in a city. When looking into the ethics of moving more people into the city for sustainability reasons, the utilitarian approach becomes an important framework. Utilitarianism can be described as choosing the scenario that will benefit

the greatest number of people, so explored in this section will be the benefits and potential negative outcomes(Brown University, n.d.).

Cities provide plenty of resources for its citizens. For example, in cities citizens have better access to health care: “Less than 11 percent of physicians in the U.S. practice in rural areas, yet about 20 percent of the population resides in rural areas.”(Georgetown University, n.d.). Another example of access to health care is illustrated by Caldwell (2016) can highlight the differences in just living in one area to another can have: “Rural status confers additional disadvantage for most of the health care use measures, independently of poverty and health care supply.”(Caldwell, 2016). With both of these sources it seems that rural areas seem to lack the ability to provide adequate healthcare services. Having more people living in cities allows more people access to transportation as well. Buses are now an option as people live closer together it makes economic sense to provide the option. Families will not have to depend on cars as their main mode of transportation therefore effectively lessening the cost of living:”A household can save nearly \$10,000 by taking public transportation and living with one less car”(APTA, n.d.). This seems like a significant amount of savings, especially for a family. They could use these savings to invest in other needs or priorities in their life.

Living within cities allows you to be closer to others as well. This can be a double edged sword though. Given the current situation of the coronavirus, close proximity can lead to the spread of the virus faster than in more rural areas. This can be deadly to the occupants living in the city. A citizen would also be stuck in their apartment where out in more rural areas a house usually has a yard that an occupant could utilize to get some fresh air. One benefit to living so

close to other people is that generally a person would not have to travel so far to see someone. Groups of people can get together and organize plans to hang out.

Another negative component associated with urban areas in general is homelessness and lack of affordable housing. Usually zoning or development laws include a stipulation when developing an area in the city the developer has to build affordable housing. Whether or not these regulations are effective is a whole other point. People should have a place to live and a majority of the homeless population lives in cities. The amount of homelessness also increases due to house pricing and the amount of money required to live there(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). As the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development details, if a large population were to move into the city then this can lead to gentrification. This is because the increase in demand for housing can push others out when higher income brackets start renting in their area(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). Gentrification has a lot of negative impacts for those people living there including that there is a lack of opportunity(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). This can include lack of supplies and a difference in education(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). There is not the same financial support for these communities(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). If there is a better solution to creating housing that would allow everyone to have a home in the city then less people would be impacted by moving into the city.

Another negative impact of living in a city includes nutrition. According to Satterthwaite,"Hundreds of millions of urban dwellers face under-nutrition today, although this is far more related to their lack of income...", shows that although cities can be centers of

opportunity they can also be places where a lot of people suffer(2010). While a great place to boost the economy and increase income as the source mentions earlier, people are still not making enough to pay for the food they need or even housing sometimes( 2010). They also go on to note that a lot of higher income citizens have more intense agricultural demands but are common across rural and urban citizens of the same income bracket(2010). This would put a lot more pressure on the land and generally require more energy to produce these goods. More energy intensive products means more carbon into the air for which ultimately is a negative for everyone. On the other hand, having this demand for these agricultural products also benefits the farmer(Satterthwaite, 2010). They are able to make more money and therefore will mostly comply with the requests.

All this being said it is clear that some groups are at a disadvantage when they enter a city which is supposed to be a place of opportunity. Lack of housing and a lack of income seems to plague a lot of cities and disadvantage groups of people. There seems to be solutions for lack of housing but it really depends on how a city implements laws or provisions to help out these people. Although, cities also provide that economic growth that allows for more jobs. People who would not have had the chance to be offered a job now do with the emergence of cities. They give farmers a chance to sell worldwide(Satterthwaite, 2010). Cities also provide an opportunity to become more sustainable with less reliance on cars and more on transportation that lessens emissions. They take up less space than their more rural counterparts per person which allows trees to grow and sequester the carbon produced. Cities have the potential to become a space that is sustainable with also being fair to all depending on how it is laid out. Cities around the world can shed different light on the positive and negative sides of living in a

city, so a conclusion to all of this would be uncertain to say the least. It relies on factors that rely on the government making changes to support those people who are at a disadvantage and regulating how cities are improved and expanded. Careful consideration to how a city is laid out is how citizens will reap the most benefits. Regulatory practices can help guide city planners into designing in a way that would benefit the most and shifting the goal to minimizing the impact on the Earth while also providing housing that is affordable housing and transportation routes that allow choices.

### **Moving People to the City: Egoistic Approach to Viewing Cities**

The egoistic approach can best be described as looking out for oneself interest. People make decisions based on if the outcome will give them the most benefit(brown.edu). When looking into moving people to the city, the individuals self interest is also a key component to motivating people. With more people behind a movement that will benefit them, the easier it will be to move those people to the city.

Some benefits that living in a city provides include not having to pay for a car, job opportunities are increased, closer to goods and services required to live, access to different types of housing, and a bunch of other benefits. Cars as mentioned in the previous section create a large expense each month that the individual has to set aside. It is also a depreciating asset, in that it loses value over time. Alternatives for transportation include walking, biking, and taking public transport so it is not like a citizen loses mobility.

Living in a city also has some negative effects associated with it as well. One of them being that there usually is not a backyard with the property. Most of the green spaces are common spaces. A lot of people complain that there is not as much privacy in the city with



people surrounding them on all corners. Another consequence of living in the city is that generally people do not own the place where they live. It is nice to be able to decorate the living space as the person deems fit. Another downside to living in the city is the increase in noise. Some people enjoy the peaceful serenity of the wilderness around them instead of construction, dump trucks, or other common noises associated within the city.

To combat some of these negative qualities, city planners can better design houses so that windows or buildings do not align so people have more privacy(Beatley). There is not much city planners can do to allow everyone to have a large yard for their kids or pets so if that were a deal-breaker then that would potentially be one reason people would never move into the city. Some of the potentially annoying aspects of the city also take time to adjust. Once a person becomes acclimated to the sounds of the city it becomes background noise and less irritating. Some people can even enjoy these sounds as they do not like the silence.

The overall conclusion for this perspective is that though the benefits seem to outweigh the costs, it depends on what the person values the most regarding their own personal values. Some people may never want to live in the city because they value living a quieter life or even the chance to own their house. The question then becomes will the person outweigh their obligation to protecting the Earth rather than their own personal wants. The arguments for this approach will vary for each position taken so again values come into play.

## **Conclusion**

Using any ethical framework will give different results depending who is the focus of the framework. As demonstrated by the use of two of the ethical frameworks used previously different outcomes were come to by focusing on different perspectives. The utilitarianism

approach to some degree supported the idea that people should live in cities since they can provide resources that living in the rural areas could not while also minimizing the impact on the Earth. It would impact people of different groups in different ways. Thinking about the overall negative impact of climate change on everyone and how living in cities could potentially be less draining on the environment then leads to a positive for everyone whether they can tangibly see the benefit or not. The Egoistic approach tells a different story in that people should be able to choose where they live regardless of the consequences to others. If a person wants to live in a more rural area then they should be allowed because in their scenario that provides the most benefit to them. Each ethics view has its own worth when deciding something major and considering each with equal weight is important to making a sound decision. When considering each viewpoint a person has the power to create arguments with understanding and create a strong position as to why people should go along with them. It also allows changes to be made to a plan that would potentially decrease the negative outcomes associated with each viewpoint. In this scenario knowledge of why people do not like living in the cities and shape how we build them in the future and what we can do to improve existing cities as we expand. Considering different viewpoints also creates a holistic approach to coming to a decision, in that minority groups can voice their opinion as they are the ones who are usually the most disadvantaged.

Taking the ethics view one step further would be to see cities and rural areas from the perspective from the Earth. If the Earth was a person which one would cause the least amount of harm. Since the Earth does not have a voice we have to reason what it would be able to handle. Purely looking at this situation from the Earth's view, what should we do? We have the technology to shift our reliance on fossil fuels to renewable resources and have ways of

regulating development that would be most beneficial to the environment. If we were to know all outcomes and how each benefited or cost the Earth would we still do it? How would we shift the views of developers from making the most money out of a site to how can they create a site that is sustainable yet still profitable.

In regards to a complete study of if a rural community is better than a city community, a lot of concerns with cities is that some of the speculation that a city would be more sustainable does not consider all factors going in and out which in of itself is a difficult task. This is why a lot of researchers put a blackbox around an area of study because otherwise there would be so many factors going in that would overwhelm the study. There is also a great degree of variability that comes with comparing different communities living in the same situation as found throughout research. A great example comes from Robert Steuteville in that he compares two cities with around the same population but greatly different footprints and carbon emissions (Steuteville, R. 2019). With that said I think a comparison of two sustainably designed communities with one being in a compact city and the other being a spread out rural community be compared using almost the same input and outputs. These will change slightly but it would be interesting to see the different levels of carbon produced. If more times were given this would be how this research paper were to be expanded to try and find sustainably laid out communities and compare their ecological footprint. How could we lay out sites so that everyone has access to the same resources is another option to explore. Earth is not like a computer game where you can delete everything and start over in an instant to produce better cities, but will take time. Careful planning will need to be done to reduce our impact on the Earth especially with a still growing population.

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