

**Summary:**

## **Ethics and transport safety policy**

This report seeks to examine road safety policy from the standpoint of philosophical ethics. Vision Zero, which is presently the basis for Norwegian road safety policy, is explicitly presented as a more (or the only) ethically justifiable position towards road safety, making the question of the moral status of road safety policy all the more pertinent.

The report thus asks the twin questions: is road safety policy a field that can be fruitfully understood in relation to ethical theories, and, if so, does Vision Zero the approach to road safety stand out as necessarily more ethical than the alternatives?

In order to answer these questions, we divide the report into two parts: the first part provides an overview of major ethical traditions, while the second seeks to apply ethical theories to questions concerning road safety. In the first part, a distinction is also made between ethical theories as theories of personal moralities, and ethical theories that function on a societal level. In extension of the latter approaches, central strains of political philosophy are also introduced, as they can serve to justify practical decisions on a societal level. Eventually, some ethical concepts and distinctions that can be seen as relevant to the question of road safety are briefly described.

The second part presents the “standard view” of transport safety policy, and contrasts this with the view presented in Vision Zero. The two approaches are also compared and situated in relation to the ethical frameworks outlined earlier. A small number of central issues are discussed in more detail.

Among ethical traditions, the two standing out as most central in contemporary debate are various versions of deontology and consequentialism. Whereas consequentialism focuses on end-states, holding that acts receive their moral value from the results they produce (their consequences), deontological theories ascribe moral values to acts on the basis of their characteristics. These two approaches will often agree when it comes to ethical recommendations, but not always. The recently popular virtue ethics focuses on the moral character of individual agents and on acts as expression of this character.

The political theories discussed are utilitarianism, liberalism and contractualism. Political utilitarianism sees a political system as good when leading to the greatest amount of happiness, whereas liberalism focuses on the individuals' fundamental rights, such as the rights to life and liberty, and sees a political system as good when these rights are respected. Contractualism sees a political system as good when it conforms to the requirement of a hypothetical contract – that is, that the interventions in the liberty of individuals are justified with reference to a set of principles which a rational actor could accept as fair.

In the second part, the traditional transport safety policy in Norway is defined as “mitigated liberalism”; the “negative liberty” of the individual on the road is generally taken for granted, but the individual is highly constructed (through training, technology and culture), being subject to strict regulations when it comes to speed etc. The individuals are also seen as subjects to deontological requirements, and are held morally responsible for their behaviour in traffic. Authorities, however, making use of cost-benefit analyses, shape the system partly on the basis of utilitarian considerations.

Vision Zero, with its focus on end-states, is seen as a consequentialist moral standpoint, with what has been described as a “no-trade-off” view of human life. Also, the vision introduces a new class of deontological actors, as authorities are seen as morally responsible for road accidents.

The report concludes that Vision Zero seems to be an attempted redefinition of the role and status of the road system; it is now to be seen as a sphere in which the authorities are continually acting through the physical structure, and where they are morally responsible for these actions. This redefinition, however, does not follow directly from any of the ethical theories discussed above. There seems to be a good case for trying to evaluate the road system in terms of a pluralist moral framework, as the existing approaches all seem to exclude some of the relevant ethical considerations.