

## Ethics and road safety policy



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Beate Elvebakk

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The report provides a brief presentation of leading ethical and political theories, seeking to locate various approaches to road safety policy in relation to these theories. The ethical implications of Vision Zero are discussed in some detail.

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Rapporten gir en kort oversikt over sentrale etiske og politiske teorier og forsøker å plassere forskjellige tilnærminger til trafikksikkerhet i forhold til disse. Rapporten ser særlig på de etiske implikasjonene av Nullvisjonen.

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# Preface

Traffic safety work in Norway has been largely successful, and the relative number of fatalities is among the lowest in the world. In spite of this, it is frequently claimed that the authorities should do more to prevent accidents from happening, or that the methods used are ineffective. Since 2001 Norwegian Traffic Safety Policy has been based on Vision Zero: a vision of a future traffic system that should not lead to fatalities or serious injury. Part of the background for this is that any other goal is deemed morally unacceptable.

This report compares Vision Zero with the traditional paradigm for traffic safety policy in Norway with regard to their explicit and implicit ethical premises. It provides a brief presentation of some of the major ethical frameworks in use in contemporary philosophical debate, and seeks to locate the approaches to traffic safety policy in relation to these ethical positions.

The report is part of the research project *Normative Approaches to Transport Safety Policy*, managed by dr. Rune Elvik at the Institute of Transport Economics. The project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council, through the research programme Risk and Safety in the Transport Sector (RISIT). The report was written by Beate Elvebakk. Rune Elvik was responsible for quality assurance. Secretary Trude Rømming has processed the text and prepared it for printing.

Oslo, September 2005  
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**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.

**Sammendrag:**

# **Etikk og trafikksikkerhetspolitikk**

Denne rapporten behandler spørsmål om trafikksikkerhetspolitikk i lys av et moralfilosofisk rammeverk. Nullvisjonen, som nå skal danne grunnlaget for trafikksikkerhetspolitikken i Norge, har eksplisitt blitt presentert som et etisk bedre alternativ til dagens politikk. Den gjør derfor spørsmålet om trafikksikkerhetspolitikens moralske grunnlag desto mer aktuelt.

Rapporten spør hvorvidt det er fruktbart å studere trafikksikkerhetspolitikk i forhold til etiske teorier, og, hvis det er tilfelle, om Nullvisjonen nødvendigvis er en etisk bedre tilnærming enn alternativene.

Rapporten har to deler: første del gir en kort oversikt over sentrale etiske tradisjoner, mens andre del forsøksvis anvender etiske teorier på trafikksikkerhetsspørsmål. Første del innfører også et skille mellom etikk som omhandler individuelle handlinger, og etiske teorier som fungerer på et overordnet, samfunnsmessig plan. I videreføring av dette diskuteres sentrale teorier fra politisk filosofi, siden disse også kan benyttes for å begrunne samfunnsmessige avgjørelser.

Andre del presenterer “standardsynet” på trafikksikkerhetspolitikk og sammenligner dette med Nullvisjonens prinsipper. De to tilnærmingene blir også sammenlignet og plassert i forhold til de etiske rammeverkene som er blitt presentert i første del. Et lite antall sentrale spørsmål blir mer detaljert diskutert.

De to mest sentrale etiske retningene i dagens etiske debatt er varianter av deontologi og konsekvensialisme. Mens konsekvensialistiske teorier fokuserer på resultater, og hevder at handlinger får moralsk verdi på grunnlag av sine konsekvenser, gir deontologiske teorier moralsk verdi til handlinger på grunnlag av handlingens egne karakteristika. Dydsetikken, som nylig har vunnet stor popularitet, fokuserer på individuelle aktørers moralske karakter.

De politiske teoriene som blir diskutert er utilitarisme, liberalisme, og kontraktualisme. Politisk utilitarisme anser et politisk system som godt hvis det fører til den størst mulige lykke, mens liberalisme fokuserer på individers rettigheter, så som retten til liv, til frihet og lignende. Et politisk system er dermed godt hvis disse rettighetene blir respektert. Kontraktualisme anser et politisk system som godt hvis det oppfyller kravene i en hypotetisk kontrakt – dvs. at inngrep i individers frihet er tillatt hvis det skjer ut fra et sett prinsipper som en rasjonell aktør kunne akseptere som rettferdig.

I del to blir den tradisjonelle trafikksikkerhetspolitikken i Norge beskrevet som “mild liberalisme”; den individuelle trafikants “negative frihet” på veien tas stort sett for gitt, men individet er konstruert (gjennom opplæring, teknologi og kultur) og er underlagt strenge regler i veisystemet. Individene pålegges også deontologiske plikter, og er ansett som moralsk ansvarlige for egne handlinger i trafikken.



Myndighetene, som gjør bruk av nytte-kostnad-beregninger, konstruerer delvis trafikksystemet ut fra utilitaristiske betraktninger.

Siden Nullvisjonen fokuserer sterkt på resultater, blir den beskrevet som et konsekvensialistisk perspektiv, som i tillegg inntar et såkalt "no-trade-off" syn på menneskeliv. Visjonen innfører også en ny klasse deontologiske aktører, siden myndighetene pålegges moralsk ansvar for trafikkulykker.

Rapporten konkluderer med at Nullvisjonen er et forsøk på å redefinere veisystemets rolle og status i samfunnet; det skal nå ses på som et område der myndighetene kontinuerlig handler gjennom den fysiske infrastrukturen, og hvor de har moralsk ansvar for disse handlingene. Denne redefinisjonen følger ikke direkte av noen av de teoriene som er blitt diskutert. For videre studier av trafikksikkerhetspolitikens etiske status burde man også forsøke å evaluere veisystemet ut fra et pluralistisk etisk rammeverk, siden alle de eksisterende tilnærmingene ekskluderer en del relevante betraktninger.

# 1 Introduction

In 2000 the Norwegian Parliament decided that road safety policy in Norway should be founded on Vision Zero. Vision Zero, originally formulated in Sweden, involves, in short, that the traffic system should be so safe that its workings should not normally lead to loss of lives or to permanent injury. This as opposed to the present situation, where it is implicitly accepted that injuries and fatalities are the cost of mobility.

Obviously, accepting a new vision for road safety does not in itself change anything, but the very adoption of this policy raises a number of questions. The most obvious is whether, and how, such a goal is attainable. But, apart from this; given that the means to this end are likely to be controversial ones, questions also arise over whether Vision Zero is the *right* policy, and whether we should adopt just any means in order to reach the stated goal.

Questions of what is right or wrong, in a moral sense, are traditionally dealt with in the discipline of ethics. Since Vision Zero has been heralded as an ethically sounder approach to road safety policy, this is a good time to conduct a systematic inquiry into the ethical bases of Norwegian transport safety policy. Transport safety policy deals with questions of life and death, but the ethical aspects of these problems are often ignored or undercommunicated.

This report is an outcome of the research project *The normative foundations for transport safety* conducted at the Institute of Transport Economics (TØI), which seeks to shed light on the actual and possible ethical premises and considerations that inform or could inform transport safety policy. The project is sponsored by The Norwegian Research Council, and is part of the research programme RISIT.

This report seeks to give an overview of some of the most central contemporary ethical theories. Since the field of ethics is too vast to be presented in its entirety within the confines of this report, approaches have been rather eclectically chosen on the basis of their fruitfulness for the understanding of transport safety. In addition, the report also presents a brief overview of central strains of political philosophy, which are perhaps not ethical theories in a strict sense, but that complement ethics in the wider field of practical philosophy. Since transport policy is invariably construed in a sphere that is at least partly political, it seems reasonable to include the theories that deal with practical choices in the political field, and have a strong relationship with ethical theories “proper”.

## 2 Philosophical Ethics

Philosophical ethics is the theoretical study of human morality and its foundations. It is customary to distinguish between normative and non-normative (descriptive) approaches to ethics. Normative ethics can also come in the form of applied ethics, or practical ethics. In this paper, we will first be occupied exclusively with normative ethical theories, before introducing some possible applications to the field of transport safety policy towards the end. Ethical theories often investigate the foundations of morality, and seek to find what common denominators distinguish ethical considerations from other aspects of life. In short: what does morality consist in? Philosophers have typically tried to find whether actions or incidents that are ascribed moral qualities (positive or negative) have common characteristics that make it possible to find a more basic source of moral value. Are good actions those that conform to divine law? Those that benefit humanity? Those that respect the call of duty?

Practical or applied ethics, on the other hand, seeks to find answers to concrete moral problems. Typical examples of questions that have been subjected to ethical investigation are abortion, euthanasia and biotechnology; all contested issues in society on which there is strong disagreement. In these cases, the customary approach is to consider how different ethical theories would treat the problem under scrutiny. This, however, may not be entirely straightforward, nor is it given that one theory leads conclusively to one answer. As in all branches of philosophy, philosophical ethics believes in the importance of logically sound argumentation, and methods and arguments are similar to those employed in other philosophical disciplines.

In spite of the fact that ethicists are often drawn to highly contested questions, ethical theories and ethical investigations cannot usually provide absolute, undisputable answers to moral problems. What ethical theories *can* do, is to make the argument appear in a clearer, more transparent form, thus making it easier for people to accept or reject it, given that its premises and its reasoning are in full view. Thus, applied ethics can serve as a basis for more informed ethical judgment.

Beauchamp (1992) lists the following strategies<sup>1</sup> for resolving moral disagreements:

- 1) Obtaining objective information
- 2) Providing definitional clarity
- 3) Adopting a common code/framework

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<sup>1</sup> A similar list is provided in Glover (1977). His strategies include: clarifying concepts, exposing logical inadequacies, exposing inconsistencies in principles, and pointing to unacceptable consequences.

- 4) Using examples and counterexamples
- 5) Analysing arguments for inconsistencies and unexpected consequences

A central assumption for much moral philosophy is that we must presuppose that most people have a fairly good idea of what is right or wrong. Unlike natural facts, ethical qualities cannot be observed independently from the people who give expression to them. People's ethical attitudes are therefore our only source of knowledge of the ethical field. In spite of this, most philosophers do not unreservedly trust our everyday ethical considerations. This sentiment was expressed by Immanuel Kant, who said that "*Innocence is indeed a glorious thing; only, on the other hand, it is very sad that it cannot well maintain itself and is easily seduced.*" (Kant, 1998). Today, most philosophers tend to use less florid language, and they frequently refer to pre-theoretical knowledge of ethics as "moral intuition". Moral intuition is often called upon to decide whether the implications of a given ethical framework can be deemed acceptable or not.

In order to sum up, we might say that a lot of philosophical ethics holds that most people most of the time know what is right and good, but that they do not know *why* it is right and good. And, as Kant's quote illustrates, an underlying premise of moral philosophy is that people – not understanding the implicit principles upon which their ethical judgments are based – may make bad decisions. Ethical theory seeks to prevent this from happening. Most moral philosophers accept most of people's ethical "gut reactions", but seek to make them more consistent, and to apply the assumed underlying general principles to new cases where our intuitions may not work.

Traditional ethical theories are often divided into a few broad classes, the most central of which are deontological theories and consequentialist theories. A brief description of the basics of each will be presented below. In addition, there is also a shorter outline of the theory known as virtue ethics, which has gained considerable popularity in recent years.

One problem involved in evaluating the ethical foundations of transport policies is that many ethical theories function at an individual level. They concern the bases for making individual ethical choices. Questions that are relevant to the moral life of individuals are not necessarily very helpful at the level of politics, and these theories may not be directly applicable to this field. Therefore, this paper also considers some theories that are sometimes presented under different disciplinary headings, such as political theory, or social theory. These approaches are strongly related to ethical theory, and typically use many of the same sources and references as theories of personal morality.

One of the few theories that seem to be equipped to deal with moral problems on the societal scale is utilitarianism, which offers a convenient macro perspective in claiming that the moral is that which maximizes utility. This is also in practice a theory that is frequently employed in policy considerations, as cost/benefit analyses are arguably an operationalization of this perspective. Due to its possible application across levels (and due to the *prima facie* appeal of its basic tenets), utilitarianism will be used as the starting point in this presentation of ethical theories.

Before embarking on the presentation, I would like to emphasize that the theories discussed here are extremely complex, and that many competing versions and interpretations co-exist. The presentations that follow will therefore necessarily have to be simplifications, and they do not do justice to the original theories. However, I hope the simplified versions can still provide a basis for further discussions.

## 3 Personal moralities

### 3.1 Utilitarianism

Consequentialist theories, are, as the name suggests, concerned with the *consequences* of human actions. A given action is deemed good or bad on the basis of its consequences, or, as we might say, on the basis of an evaluation of the state(s) of affairs it produces. This evaluation can take many forms, depending on what is considered “good” or “bad” states of affairs. Since the action is ascribed its moral value on the basis of the state produced, this kind of moral theory is also described as “goal-directed”. The system of morality is based on the desirability of the goal in question, and this goal is what defines morality.

The goal or measure in question can take many forms. One of the most frequently employed measures has been human happiness, or pleasure. In this case, consequentialism takes the form of “classical utilitarianism”, which is associated with the writings of Bentham and Stuart Mill. Classical utilitarian theories see acts as morally good if they increase the overall accumulated sum of happiness among people, and as morally bad if they decrease this sum. “Utility” is defined as happiness, in the form of pleasure (of some sort), and should be maximized in society. Conversely, morally bad actions increase the overall sum of pain in society (Or to decrease happiness. Utilities are considered to be found on a continuum). Classical utilitarianism does not necessarily restrict pleasure and pain to simple hedonism, but can also argue that “higher pleasures” (such as learning and refinement) have to count in such calculations.

Saying that an action is morally right, then, amounts to saying that it will lead to greater happiness, and conversely:

*“actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, or the absence of pain; by unhappiness pain, and the privation of pleasure.” (JS Mill, quoted in Beauchamp, 1992).*

Classical utilitarians agree on the following principle: An act is right if, and only if, it can reasonably be expected to produce the greatest balance of good, or the least balance of harm.

Present-day utilitarianism tends to define utility in terms of preferences rather than happiness. This means an act is seen as good if it promotes a state where more individuals’ preferences are met, and fewer are frustrated. Individual preference-based utilitarianism thus abstains from explicitly defining utility, as utility is defined by individuals through their preferences.

Since the kind of utilitarianism outlined above – so called act utilitarianism – tends to encounter serious problems, such as the fact that it seems to defend causing pain to innocent humans given that this can prevent a greater number of others from harm, later utilitarian theorists have usually seen the principle of utility to justify moral *rules*, rather than moral acts. Thus they see general rules as being subject to the principle of utility, whereas single actions are not. This move also frees the utilitarian from making complex calculations before acting. A rule utilitarian assumes that moral rules are given their status because they are rules that in the long term will produce the highest amount of utility. This also gives the rule utilitarian an obligation to try to find what moral rules do in fact produce utility, and to act according to these. Moral rules that do not produce optimum utility cannot be seen to be justified. This may again lead to extremely complex calculations of utilities.

Utilitarianism is often criticised for not being *distribution-sensitive*: the emphasis is placed on the total *amount* of happiness and unhappiness, not on its *distribution*. In a utilitarian universe, a small percentage of the population might be required to bear a disproportional share of burdens in order to forward the total sum of happiness: You might – in the extreme case – defend the Roman practice of allowing people to be eaten by wild beasts for the entertainment of the masses. Very few people suffered, and very many people were entertained.

There have been attempts to remedy this shortcoming, and some contemporary utilitarians choose either to include distributive justice as a goal in its own right into the calculations, or they give higher value to the increased utility of the least fortunate. (Scanlon, 1988)<sup>2</sup>.

However, the lack of distribution sensitivity may be a mere symptom of a more deep-seated problem; Sen and Williams (1982) criticise utilitarianism for taking “a remarkably narrow view of being a *person*. Essentially, utilitarianism sees persons as locations of their respective utilities – as the sites at which such activities as desiring and having pleasure and pain takes place. Once note has been taken of the person’s utility, utilitarianism has no further direct interest in any information about him” (p.4). A similar concern is voiced by Glover (1977) who argues that “the utilitarian view makes people replaceable” (p.72).

The problem with utilitarianism is probably not that it deals with utilities and consequences, as these are considerations that would be introduced into the moral reasoning of most people, the problem is that utility is being treated as a homogenous mass. Utility, in the utilitarian rendering, is frequently neither distinguished according to quality or to moral value, nor does it matter to whom this utility belongs. Utility then, is seen as an entity in its own right, and a very particular form of entity at that. It is autonomous, homogenous, and quantifiable. Its translation into money by cost-benefit analyses is therefore not a very big leap.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Rawls’ definition of utilitarianism, Scanlon’s “two-level theory” cannot be characterised as utilitarianism. Rawls sees it as a defining characteristic of utilitarianism that the good is defined independently from the right, hence introducing right (in terms of fair distribution) into the good turns the Scanlon’s theory into a variety of deontology. (Freeman, 1994)

This aspect of utilitarianism is often referred to as its neglect of people's *autonomy*. Williams (1988) argues that a utilitarian perspective overlooks how people construct their lives around their own projects, which they cannot be expected to simply rationally change or give up if overall happiness so requires. People's projects are what make them the people they are, and a looser association to one's own projects is dehumanising. According to Williams, utilitarians simply misrepresent the nature of human life and of human interaction.

A number of further criticisms have also been raised against using utilitarianism as a basis for personal morality, and we will briefly mention a few<sup>3</sup>:

- Quantification of intrinsic value is either impossible or impractical. (Thus cost-benefit analyses – and most recent utilitarian theories – are based not on intrinsic value but on individual preferences).
- Individual preference-utilitarianism is satisfactory only if a range of “acceptable values” can be formulated (Beauchamp 1992, p. 142) – as when cost-benefit analysis only presents individuals with pre-determined options. (We would not want to include the preferences of sadists in our moral calculations. Few people would feel that it is a good thing when sadistic preferences are being fulfilled. Immoral options might, however, possibly be disallowed because they produce pain, but then, so do many options that are not considered immoral).
- There is an informational problem: all possible options cannot be calculated. This may create a fallacious impression of completeness.
- Some values/preferences might be considered to be “higher” than others. (e.g. the preservation of a child's life could be considered more important than the right to drive at high speeds even if given the same preference). There can be important qualitative differences between goals that are assigned the same preference-values.
- Utilitarianism cannot distinguish between morally obligatory actions and supererogatory actions. If in any given situation, one would be obliged to carry out whatever action would bring the most happiness to the world, this would result in very strict moral requirements. Most people would not agree that this kind of optimum value is obligatory.
- Utilitarianism undervalues autonomy (through undermining the difference between actively causing and passively witnessing).

We will return to some of these points below.

Finally, we should also note that many moral philosophers oppose utilitarianism because they consider the theory to misrepresent the nature of moral motivation. These philosophers would argue that we usually act out of concern for individuals, and not out of concern for mankind.

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<sup>3</sup> We should note that there are probably almost as many versions of utilitarianism as there are professed utilitarians. This means that all of the criticisms below cannot be raised against all versions of utilitarianism, as some formulations allow for qualitative differences between preferences, for instance.



## 3.2 Varieties of Deontological Theories

Unlike utilitarian approaches, deontological theories claim that some actions are right or wrong whatever their (perceived) consequences: Keeping a promise is the right thing to do, even if you believe the consequences of you breaking it to be more beneficial in the long run than the consequences of you keeping it. Telling the truth is right even though the consequences of truth-telling may be unfortunate<sup>4</sup>. These are examples, a deontological theory does not necessarily have to insist on promise-keeping and truth-telling; the important thing is that a deontologist will have to say that there are acts that are the right acts to do, even if there are other alternatives whose consequences would seem to be more beneficial to a greater number of people. Deontological theories do not take the basis of ethics to be found in the consequences of actions.

More technically, Beauchamp (1982) defines deontological theories as giving the following conditions for morally right actions:

*“An action is right if, and only if, the action satisfies conditions C1, C2, C3...Cn”. (p.129)*

Deontological theories, then, give certain conditions that actions must conform to in order to be morally right. These conditions may vary, but a typical (and famous) example of a deontological theory is Kant's moral theory. According to Kant, an act is morally right if it conforms to the “categorical imperative”, which is a necessary element of every rational person's cognitive make up. The categorical imperative is that which determines whether an action is right or wrong, and as such something we are always already aware of, but which we do not necessarily know how to articulate. Kant presented several different formulations of this most basic principle, all of which were, he claimed, equivalent (this however, is controversial). One of his formulations of the categorical imperative is that you should:

*“Act as if the maxim of your action was to become through your will a universal law of nature.” (Kant, 1988)*

This does not invite utilitarian considerations, as it is the general form of the action, not its consequences, that determines its moral worth. There is something about the act itself that is relevant for its moral standing.

This, of course opens up a whole series of problems, as it is not a given what the “form” of a given action is. We will, however, not go into this here, as the Kantian perspective is meant only to serve as an illustration of a classical deontological approach to ethical problems.

Another formulation of the imperative, known as the “humanity formulation”, explicitly draws attention to the individuals involved in moral transactions. This formulation states that we should never act in such a way that we treat Humanity,

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<sup>4</sup> Deontologists do not necessarily have to insist that no considerations of consequences can overrule the rightness or wrongness of an action. Most contemporary deontologists would agree that missing a lunch date for the sake of helping casualties after a major accident would be the right thing to do. The point is not that consequences cannot enter into the equation; the point is that there are also other aspects of an action that may influence its moral value.

whether in ourselves or in others, as a means only but always as an end in itself. This would for instance mean that it was impermissible to actively sacrifice a few people for the benefit of the many.

We observed above that utilitarian theories have been criticised for taking too narrow a view of persons, and too narrow a view of interpersonal relations. Deontological theories, however, usually take the persons involved into consideration. For deontological theories, it can frequently be the case that an action that is morally right for one person is morally wrong for another. This has to do with the different kinds of relations that people can have with one another. For instance, one person may have obligations that others have not. This aspect of deontological theories is sometimes referred to as “agent relative elements” (Scheffler, 1988), as the moral status of an action is determined relative to the persons involved, and their personal histories. I could, for instance, be required to do something, because I have promised to do so in the past. The same requirement would not be made of someone who had not made a similar promise. I can also have special obligations to people with whom I have certain relationships, such as friends or family members. Agent relative constraints can sometimes prohibit the performance of acts that would have optimal results. You might choose to help a friend in financial troubles, even if the same amount of money would have produced greater happiness if given to a humanitarian organisation.

On the other hand, agent relativity may also lead to a more lenient attitude, as what it focuses on is *actions*, not results. From a utilitarian perspective, allowing something to happen amounts to the same as actively causing it to happen, from a moral point of view. Deontological theories, however, emphasising the active involvement of agents, and their ownership of their own actions, make a distinction between the two cases. A deontological theory “requires that we *avoid* murder at all costs, not that we *prevent* it at all costs”. (Nagel, 1988, p.60). Thus deontological theories might be said to present a more realistic – if also defeatist – view of human ethical life.

### **3.3 Virtue ethics**

In recent years, virtue ethics or ethics of character is often presented as a completely separate class of ethics (*Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*), and as a possible rival to deontological and utilitarian theories (Hursthouse, 1991). Virtue ethics takes the ethical individual as its starting point, and focuses on the virtuous or moral character. It is associated with the ethical writings of Plato and Aristotle, but has had a renaissance in Anglo-American moral philosophy since the 1950's, when it was re-introduced by GEM Anscombe in the seminal article “Modern Moral Philosophy”.

Where utilitarianism finds the grounds of ethics in producing human happiness, and deontology bases ethics upon carrying out the right kinds of actions, virtue ethics fundamentally see ethics as having to do with good characters. (Etymologically, virtue ethicists have a strong case, as the word ethics is derived from ancient Greek *Ethos*, meaning habit or character.) Hursthouse (1991) lays out the basic structure of virtue ethics in two principles:

*Premise 1.* An action is right iff [if and only if] it is what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances

*Premise 1a.* A virtuous agent is one who acts virtuously, that is, one who has and exercises virtues.

*Premise 2.* A virtue is a character trait a human being needs to flourish or live well.

Good character cannot be seen as independent from the lives the characters live, and fundamentally, virtue ethics is concerned not only with good individual actions, but with leading good lives, and not only in the moral sense of the term. Thus virtue ethics sees a good life to consist in human flourishing, which means that individuals take part in society in the right way, and make the most of their capabilities. Virtue ethics can therefore be seen as a more “holistic” approach to ethics than either of the alternatives outlined above. It does not seek to isolate the sphere of the ethical from other human lifespaces.

The virtues heralded by virtue ethics are character traits such as kindness, justice, courage, honesty, etc. According to virtue ethics, then, we should strive to be virtuous – and to act as a virtuous person would in every situation in life. This does not imply that there are clear rules by which one can automatically act virtuously – the theory recognizes that living well is difficult, and that ethics is not an exact science. It takes time to achieve the kind of ethical wisdom that is needed in order to act virtuously in every situation, and this kind of wisdom comes only with good moral education and lived experience.

Virtue ethics therefore breaks sharply with the two ethical traditions discussed above: it places individual lives in a broader context, and it forges a link between the *good* life and the *ethical* life. Life cannot be good unless you are a good person, and, conversely, you are more likely to become a good person if your life is good, in an inclusive sense. As opposed to this, deontology and utilitarianism often emphasise the need to sacrifice one’s pleasures or inclinations in order to act morally.

Another distinguishing feature of virtue theory is that it does not necessarily (unlike utilitarianism in particular) insist that there is one right, or one best, solution to an ethical dilemma. There are different ways of being a virtuous person, and different moral problems call for an awareness of the particularities of the situation and the acknowledgment that the particular situation may not have one moral solution, in the traditional sense, even if it may have only one right solution for the particular agent involved.

## **4 Political theories: utilitarianism liberalism, contractualism**

There are a number of political theories that could be relevant to the study of road safety. Here we will limit ourselves to discussing three of the best known theories; utilitarianism, liberalism, and contractualism<sup>5</sup>. The reason for this is that these are probably the theories that best correspond to the political views voiced in contemporary debate on road safety. This does not mean that the various participants in the debates do necessarily conform to one of these theories as such, but that the majority of arguments in use can be seen as deriving from one of these traditions.

Whereas political utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory, contractualism and liberalism are seen as deontological theories, as they espouse the idea that citizens have certain inalienable rights that cannot be overruled for the sake of the greater good. There are conditions that political systems must conform to if they are to be ethically acceptable, such as – for instance – respecting the fundamental liberty of citizens.

### **4.1 Utilitarianism**

We have already discussed the basic principles of utilitarianism. Given that the theory is strictly impersonal, it may seem better fit to deal with moral problems on a societal scale than as an instrument of personal morality. As a public authority, it might seem, you could do worse than have the greatest possible happiness of the public as your goal. Utilitarianism is by its very nature well suited to form the basis for deliberations over policy. The founders of utilitarianism were strongly interested in judicial reform, and utilitarian theory was developed with this goal in mind. The following quote should also serve to illustrate the close relations between classical utilitarian theory and cost/benefit analyses as they are used in policy deliberations today:

*“To take an exact account then of the general tendency of any act, by which the interest of a community are affected, proceed as follows. Begin with any one person of those whose interests seem most immediately to be affected by it...Sum up all the values of all the pleasures on the one side, and those of all the pains on the other. The balance, if it be on the side of pleasure, will give the good tendency of the act upon the whole, with respect to the interest*

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<sup>5</sup> These theories are not mutually exclusive. Contemporary contractualist theories are frequently liberal. The theories do, however, have separate historical roots, and are not necessarily overlapping. Thomas Hobbes, the first contract theorist, was certainly not liberal.

*of that individual person; if on the side of pain, the bad tendency of it upon the whole.*

*Take an account of the number of persons whose interests appear to be concerned; and repeat the above process with respect to each. Sum up the numbers expressive of the degrees of good tendency, which the act has, with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is good upon the whole: do this again with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is bad upon the whole. Take the balance; which, if on the side of pleasure, will give the general good tendency of the act, with respect to the total number or community of individuals concerned, if on the side of pain, the general evil tendency, with respect to the same community.”*

(Jeremy Bentham, quoted in Beauchamp p.139f.)

Utilitarianism can easily be applied to a political situation, but the objections mentioned above still hold. In addition, other considerations apply when utilitarianism is used as a political theory. The below list of criticisms of utilitarianism as a political theory was put forth by Hegel (Walton, 1983), and it points to some of the same aspects of the theory as those we saw criticised above:

- Utilitarianism provides an impoverished conception of man and the role of social and political life.
- Individual “wants” cannot be understood as given facts, and cannot be coherently ordered (which is exactly what is attempted through cost-benefit analyses).
- Wants (preferences) are subject to instability over time.
- Individuality can only be secured through the development of a theory of the moral worth and claims of individuals.
- Interests cannot be subject to empirical investigation.
- A man’s interest is an expression of how he conceives of himself, which is partly a function of his social and political context.
- The individualist assumptions of utilitarianism obscure important facts about having wants.
- In addition, there are also more general objections that do not relate to the interpretation of the political individual, but have to do with the problem of aggregate numbers<sup>6</sup>:
- Utilitarianism may sanction injustice or violation of rights (such as, presumably, the right to life).

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<sup>6</sup> As earlier, I would like to point out that there are versions of utilitarianism to which this criticism does not apply. This goes for some versions of rule utilitarianism, for instance, which argue that moral rules that did not respect the rights of individuals would cause so much fear and anxiety as to not contribute to the best overall state of affairs.

- Utilitarianism may have anti-liberal consequences. Strong interventions in peoples' lives seem to be justified if higher amounts of general happiness can be produced this way.
- Majority interests override the interests of the minority. The minority is bound to lose out in the moral calculus.

## **4.2 Liberalism/Libertarianism**

Liberalism is, as its name implies, a political philosophy that places considerable weight on the value of liberty, and more specifically, it emphasises the liberty of the individual agent. Humans are basically free beings; this is what we might call the "natural state". Public authority and law, in so far as it infringes on the liberty of individuals, must therefore be justified in order to be valid. Most liberals would argue that the power of the state should be limited, and that its primary objectives should be protecting the liberty of its citizens.

There are many strains of liberalism, of which the more extreme is frequently called libertarianism. In libertarianism, the liberty of the individual is regarded as absolute, and the role of the state can only be justified as long as it is severely restricted:

*"It holds that agents, at least initially, fully own themselves and have moral powers to acquire property rights in external things under certain conditions. These property rights (in their own person and in other things) set the limits of permissible non-consensual force against a person: such force is permissible only when it is necessary to prevent that person from violating someone's rights or to impose rectification for such violation (e.g., compensation or punishment). The use of force against an innocent person is thus not permissible to benefit that person (paternalism), to benefit others (e.g., compulsory military service), or even to prevent third parties from violating the rights of others (e.g., killing innocents when necessary to prevent a terrorist attack). These limits on the use of force thus radically limit the legitimate powers of government."*

(Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, *Libertarianism*).

Obviously, this conflicts with a utilitarian perspective, where authorities can justify considerable interference with a citizen's life as long as it furthers the common good.

One consequence of this is that libertarians will hold that there should be no constraints on allowing harm and maximal constraints on harming. You have no right to hurt anyone else, but then again, if someone else is suffering, you will have absolutely no political obligation to alleviate their suffering. Libertarianists are in favour the minimalist state, whose main task is to protect its citizens from crime to their person and property:

*"An ultraminimal state maintains a monopoly over all use of force except that necessary in immediate self-defence, and so excludes private (or agency) retaliation for wrong and exaction for of compensation; but it*

*provides protection and enforcement services only to those who purchase its protection and enforcement policies.”*

(Nozick, 1988)

The libertarianist will therefore seek to restrict the sphere of state regulation and control. The citizens should not be subject to state intervention unless they have actively brought this about through breaking laws or regulations that protect other citizens' rights. This means, as we have noted, that paternalistic laws and measures (that are meant to protect citizens from the consequences of their own actions) are precluded. The freedom of individuals to choose extends to choices that are objectively bad for them.

### 4.3 Contractualism

Social contract theory was first associated with the writings of Thomas Hobbes. Writing immediately after the English civil war, Hobbes took a pessimistic view of human natural tendencies, and believed that strong leadership was needed in order to prevent a war of all against all. The social contract was an imaginary institution giving the sovereign power in return for security: the citizen would give up some of his freedom in return for the safety and rule of law enforced by the sovereign.

In these writings, the original contract was first and foremost seen as a justification for legal authorities; the state or sovereign has legitimate authority because the absence of such an authority would lead to conditions that would be insufferable for the greater part of the population. (Hobbes famously describes human life in the natural state as: “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”.)

Later theorists have taken more optimistic views of the role of an original contract, and of authority. The most famous contemporary version of contractualism<sup>7</sup> is John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971), in which he makes use of the device of a hypothetical contract negotiation process in order to give content to the idea of a just society. The just society, in his view, is one which would be accepted by all participants in such a negotiating process, *given that they were ignorant of what position they would hold in the ensuing society*. The just society, then, is much like a fair game, whose rules have been established before the players were assigned their roles. This way, according to Rawls, a just society is one in which every single individual is given an acceptable position. This is usually taken to mean that all individuals must have an opportunity to create a good life for themselves, whatever their background, race, religion etc. However, it is usually *not* seen to imply radical egalitarianism, as many people

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<sup>7</sup> Social contract theory is frequently divided into two versions; contractarianism and contractualism. Whereas contractarianism sees the social contract as a device securing the interests of self-interested individuals, contractualism sees the basis of the contract as being a fundamental respect for the rights of persons, and that the contract must therefore be justifiable to every individual. The two are obviously strongly related, but in the following, I will refer to contractualism, rather than to contractarianism.

would presumably want to have the opportunity to improve their own lot beyond that of others.

Contractualism is related to deontological views in ethics. Like deontological positions, contractualism tends to emphasise the role and dignity of the single individual, even if this is only as a hypothetical co-writer of a hypothetical law. (The idea of the “original contract” can be seen as similar to Kant’s idea of an original law guiding human behaviour. In each example, the original institution is seen to restrict, but also to justify, human actions.)

Contractualism can perhaps be seen as a middle road between utilitarianism and libertarianism; while it does not restrict the power of the state as severely as do libertarian theories, it does not usually admit the kinds of radical interference in citizens’ lives that will arguably be justifiable from a utilitarian perspective.



## 5 Monism vs. Pluralism

Utilitarianism (but not necessarily consequentialism) is what is known as a *monistic* ethical theory. It claims that there is one, and only one source of moral value, and this source is general utility, however this is defined. This, however, is not a necessary assumption for an ethical theory. Deontology need not be a monistic theory, though in its standard Kantian form, it is.

Rather than making utility the sole ethical principle, the philosopher Thomas Nagel claims that it is one of 5 fundamental types of value that give rise to basic conflict. The five types of values are:

- 1) obligation
- 2) general rights
- 3) utility
- 4) perfectionist ends or values (science, art)
- 5) commitment to own projects

Nagel does not argue that these principles can be reduced to a single more fundamental value, but rather that morality is a complex web of sometimes conflicting requirements:

*“I do not believe that the source of value is unitary – displaying apparent multiplicity only in its application to the world. I believe that value has fundamentally different kinds of sources, and that they are reflected in the classification of values into types.”*

(Nagel, quoted in Beauchamp, p. 59)

Other philosophers have held similar views: Alistair MacIntyre has claimed that the multitude of sources and societies from which we have imported our ethical theories, makes it impossible to create one complete and consistent ethical theory for our time. In a more optimistic vein, Charles Taylor (1992) holds that our sources of values are multifarious, because we know and respect several different pictures of what goodness consists in.

Recently, a related approach to applied ethics has been advocated by Beauchamp and Childress (1994), especially in the field of genetically modified food. Their approach is often referred to as principlism. They argue that our ethical principles are not in need of reduction to one fundamental source of value. Principlism makes no reference to ethical theory, but respect ethical principles (such as justice, autonomy, well-being) as they stand. The principles must in each case be weighted against each other, and against our moral intuitions, but they need no justification beyond their general and widespread acceptance.

## 6 Ethical Implications for Transport Safety Policy

Having presented some of the most important approaches to philosophical ethics, we will now turn to the question of whether these theories can be of use in the evaluation of transport safety policy. In order to answer this, we will first have to determine whether transport safety policy can be seen as a legitimate field for ethical considerations. Is there an ethical aspect to transport safety, and, if this is the case, is this also reflected at the level of policy?

It is probably quite uncontroversial to claim that there is an ethical aspect to transport safety in general. Given that behaviour in traffic has the potential to cause death or serious injury, there are clearly moral considerations that apply, and moral judgments could rightly be passed upon people who behaved recklessly or even aggressively, and thus endangered others in traffic.

The harder question is whether the fact that individual road users are subject to moral judgment also implies that ethical considerations apply at a policy level, and if so, how. We may find that morality is a personal responsibility, and that the state should not interfere in this area, beyond punishing those who have harmed others. This could correspond to an extreme libertarian position, as described above (and would already imply an ethical judgment). However, even if libertarian, the judicial system will always rely to some degree on moral judgment; murder and theft is illegal in part because it is deemed objectively wrong. Secular states will typically try to balance these considerations in such a way that not everything that is considered immoral is made illegal, and not everything that is illegal is considered immoral. The distinction is frequently drawn between the private and public domains. Private depravity is usually not illegal.

It seems natural to consider traffic behaviour as belonging in the public domain: people who are endangered by one person's lack of responsibility may be complete strangers to the driver. Traffic therefore seems a reasonable field for state regulation, and the traffic rules and their implementation seem well founded in the legal tradition. Pre-empting harm through a certain degree of regulation of risky behaviours is deemed acceptable by most people. The question that remains is how far public/legal responsibility and authority should go? But this does not, as pointed out above, preclude the possibility that this is also a moral question. Should these regulatory measures be judged by ethical standards?

In a social democracy like Norway, it seems fair that we do in public judicial matters make reference to such general moral requirements as fairness of distribution, and fairness of retribution. The very legitimacy of the state is to some degree based on such implicit moral considerations. Public policy should be seen as morally acceptable, at the very least. It is therefore reasonable to expect road safety policy to meet basic ethical standards, as they are perceived in society.

This would probably have to mean that some such basic foundation for road safety policy could be deemed intrinsically morally superior to another in corresponding more accurately to the ethical standards of society. This is indeed the claim behind Vision Zero, which is presented as a more – or perhaps the only – ethically sound approach to road safety. The above concession does not imply, however, that the ethical soundness of the platform follows automatically from the stated goal of the policy.

## 6.1 The Standard View: Mitigated Liberalism

The traditional paradigm for road safety in Norway has been an attempt to limit the number of accidents without too severely restricting the freedom of the car-using population. The underlying ethical notion behind much national discourse on traffic and ethics seems to be what we might term “mitigated liberalism”. In general, the liberty of individuals to drive where, when, and how much they please is seen as the “natural state”, and restrictions and limitations must be justified by reference to harm done to others, directly or indirectly. That said, the traffic system is heavily regulated, so that drivers and vehicles are thoroughly standardised through such measures as training and education, periodic vehicle inspection, automatic traffic surveillance, random traffic controls, etc. The underlying idea seems to be freedom, but freedom for highly standardised liberal subjects. The free traffic user is a trained, sober, alert person in a vehicle that meets the set safety requirements. The liberal subject is a highly constructed unit, and this construction in itself reflects ethical judgments – on what it is to be a responsible individual. This individual is in turn subject to the basic guidelines of the system, such as regulations and speed limits. The scope and severity of these regulations, are, however, contested. Interestingly, the requirements to the driver and vehicle are much less so.

The liberal/libertarian ideology is always present in the debate on road safety, whether as the standpoint of the speaker, or as the expected opposition. The debate is often very strongly polarised between liberal and anti-liberal positions: the car-owners’ organisations have usually resisted imposed restrictions, whereas safety- and environmental organisations focus on harms caused by traffic and support restrictive measures.

Still, the general idea in society seems to be that within the limits of traffic law people should make their own choices, as they know what is best for them, given that they fulfil the general requirements for being a responsible traffic user. This idea may seem uncontroversial, but can be challenged at several levels.

- 1) *Knowledge*. People may actually not have the necessary information to know what is best for them. In terms of behaviour in traffic, this might for instance mean that they do not know what situations are more risky than others, and they may not know the best way to avoid unnecessary risk. It is not a given that every buyer of a new car knows which cars are the safest, or what kinds of safety equipment are most efficient. Also, they may not know how much risk increases when changing from a lower speed to a higher one.
- 2) *“Weakness of will”*. People may often know what is best for them, and even desire to do what is best for them, but not be able to follow up their decision.

This might mean that many of those who use their cars frequently would ideally have wanted to use them less, so as to save money or take care of the environment or get more exercise. Thus, state actions that lead to less car usage (whether this happens through physical planning, higher petrol prices, more expensive cars, road pricing or actual regulations against car use) will arguably simply help citizens do what they want to do.

- 3) As a combination of the two points above, citizens might fail to/lack the information to realize that their transport behaviours lead to certain unwanted states of affairs. Consequences might be obesity or heart disease, or air pollution or accidents.
- 4) Then again, people may know the possible consequences of their actions, but still go ahead. However, as people tend to value their present more than their future, they may bitterly regret this in a few years time. Is it then acceptable to act in anticipation of their changed opinions. (One would, for instance, imagine that most people who have lung cancer regret that they started smoking. Does this justify banning cigarettes?)
- 5) Collective actions. In order to achieve certain goals, it is not sufficient for individuals to act individually. If an area is to be car-free, for instance, the inhabitants will probably not as individuals try to achieve this through not driving there themselves. Likewise, reducing one's own driving in order to improve air quality may seem a hopeless task. The same point can be made for adhering to traffic rules: if most people do not respect the rules, the gain for the individual decreases.
- 6) Ignorance of options. Single individuals will not at all time have perfect knowledge – or ability to imagine – the possibilities open to them. One may simply not what is best for one, because one is not able to see the relevant alternatives.

In addition, of course, traffic behaviours will often have implications for others, whether through exposing them to danger, discomfort or inconvenience. These can all serve as reasons not to adhere to the idea of a liberal system. We should, however, bear in mind that liberalism generally, and libertarianism especially, entails “maximal constraints” on harming others. Since behaviour in traffic will frequently have negative consequences for others, it is not a given that a strict liberal ideology would advocate absolute freedom for road users. The only given is that a strictly libertarian approach could not support enforcing the use of safety equipment, or other measures taken to prevent people from the consequences of their own actions (paternalism).

The Scandinavian countries differ somewhat from the liberalist model, as they, in keeping with their social democratic values, also accept paternalistic restrictions, such as compulsory wearing of seatbelts. These restrictions are usually of a very specific kind, however, and might also be justified with reference to the costs incurred for society through harming oneself (which again, of course, presupposes a society where these costs are not in fact borne by the individual: Note that these restrictions are never acceptable from a libertarian perspective, as infringements on personal liberty for the sake of the greater good is deemed immoral). Thus the ethical motivation behind the system remains somewhat ambiguous. This model is what we have termed “mitigated liberalism”; it is based on constructed

responsible subjects, rather than natural free individuals. As such, the system is perhaps best described as contractualist liberalism.

In conjunction with this, we may see a somewhat loose version of deontological ethics, or ethical systems based on personal obligations: the drivers are encouraged to act according to their moral obligations as individuals. Many safety campaigns have centred on this, trying to remind the drivers of their obligations to others, also through referring to how they would like others to behave in traffic, for instance in relation to one's own children. In general, the campaigns tend to focus on the conscience of the individual. This point is also illustrated by the legal responsibility given road users for the consequences of reckless behaviour in road traffic.

There are some aspects of safety policy that do not conform to this general picture. References are frequently made to the importance of improving road standards, and, occasionally, regulations. We might say that the process of standardisation also includes the road system, which is constructed so as to be reasonably "safe", and thus to meet with implicit ethical requirements. In this sense, the authorities are also actors who are, to some extent, subject to deontological requirements. They should keep the environment reasonably safe, just as the drivers are supposed to keep themselves safe subjects. Here, we can again argue that this policy incorporates contractualist elements.

All in all, the ethical theories underlying transportation policy in Norway have tended to emphasise the role of the isolated individual, whether this be through a liberalist theory of society, or through the deontological ethical model that focuses on the responsibility of the individual. The liberal stance goes well with the focus on individual responsibility found in deontological ethics. They are both theories that can be described as tending towards being atomistic. They both describe human interaction as secondary to the isolated individual.

On the other hand, the overarching policy has often been constructed on the basis of cost-benefit analyses, which, as we have seen, have much in common with utilitarianism. The utilities in the system are ascribed a monetary value, and calculations show what safety measures are profitable for society as a whole in terms of the aggregated sum of welfare. We might say that the classical paradigm of road safety in Norway has been one of mitigated (or contractualist) liberalism, where the individuals are subject to deontological requirements, and the authorities shape the system (partly) on the basis of utilitarian considerations. This model is somewhat simplified, but should still capture the most salient features of the picture.

## **6.2 Vision Zero**

From 2000, Norwegian road safety policy and road safety work are supposed to be based on Vision Zero. In the context of this report, we want to ask two questions of the Vision. One is what exactly the Vision says, and what this implies in practice. The other question is how Vision Zero relates to ethical theories and whether it is – as its proponents claim – in some sense ethically "better" than the traditional approaches to road safety outlined above.

Vision Zero is a vision of a traffic system that does not lead to fatalities or severe injuries. This, however, cannot in itself justify its claim to ethical superiority, as there are not necessarily major differences between wanting to reduce the number of serious accidents as much as possible, and wanting to eradicate them altogether. It would seem that either way, the best one can do is one's best.

The most ethically interesting aspect of Vision Zero, therefore, is not its ambition, but the reasoning underlying it. Vision Zero is based on two innovative premises:

- 1) That accidents will happen, but that their impacts may be so restricted as to not cause fatal harm, and
- 2) That fatal accidents are not consequences of the shortcomings of single individuals, but of the entire transportation system. This means that the authorities have a pronounced and overarching responsibility for how the road users fare in the system (Tingvall and Haworth, 1999).

These two points, obviously, are related. If we accept the inevitability of accidents, and focus on their outcomes as much as on their causes, the system surrounding the traffic casualty will have to be given much more consideration. Though accident-prevention is still considered vital, there is a notable shift in focus, as the accident (or the accident-causing failure) is not considered to be the end-point for the authorities' preventive strategies.

With its explicit goal of zero deaths in road traffic Vision Zero may be said to constitute a breach with tradition. This is further emphasized in the equally uncompromising fundamental ethical rule of the Vision: "Life and health can never be exchanged for other benefits within the society" (Tingvall and Haworth, 1999). However, this is not as straightforward as it might seem, as the practical implementation of the vision results in stated goals that are, even if ambitious, far from the uncompromising "zero deaths" (In Sweden, based on Vision Zero, the goal is to reduce the number of fatalities in traffic by 50% in the period 1996-2007. The results so far, however, are not very promising.) These goals are supposed to lead to the realisation of the Vision in the long term, but even in the long term it is not considered realistic to eliminate fatalities in road traffic altogether. The point, however, is that loss of life is not to be considered "normal", but should be so rare as to prompt immediate corrective measures on the part of the authorities.

The ethically challenging aspect of Vision Zero is that it is explicitly based on a different conception of ethics in traffic than the liberal/duty-based view outlined above. Vision Zero considers accidents system-failures, where the system includes cars as well as drivers, roads as well as signposts, pedestrians as well as motorcyclists. In short, the accident is not to be blamed on single actors, but on the interaction in the system. The agency, we might say, is distributed in the system<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Wetmore (2004) argues that a similar redistribution of responsibilities took place in the US in the sixties and seventies, when focus shifted from "crash avoidance" to the crashworthiness of vehicles. As a consequence of this new conception of traffic safety, automobile manufacturers were accorded more responsibility for the safety of the cars they produced.

This may in seem commonsensical, but does in fact constitute a break with tradition, as drivers have usually been held accountable for accidents in which they are involved, unless other factors are clearly at play. This may have been a somewhat sloppy practice, as finding the “correct” explanation for each accident may not be possible. In his pragmatic theory of explanation, the philosopher Bart van Fraassen (1980) uses a car accident as his example of how explanations are dependent on practical context. Rather than searching the one, correct explanation, he claims, we should accept that explanations are part of a practical context. Thus, we will usually look for the explanation that helps us *do* something. This means that in the case of a car accident, a mechanic will look for mechanical weaknesses, whereas a road-planner will look for weaknesses in road construction. *The* explanation does not exist. We might agree with van Fraassen, but we might also more modestly conclude that in many cases, we will see several elements working together towards a failure, thus necessitating the more holistic approach. Van Fraassen’s point is that explanations and interventions are interdependent, which should explain why adopting the explanatory apparatus of Vision Zero is likely to have practical consequences.

One politically radical consequence of Vision Zero is that the system planners are explicitly accorded responsibility for their contribution to the accidents: the road system. According to Vision Zero the road authorities should have an articulated responsibility for all accidents, and should even be obliged to seek to prevent accidents for which the road users themselves are obviously to blame<sup>9</sup>.

Vision Zero is frequently presented as a reaction against a utilitarian bias in road safety work (Tingvall & Lie, 2002). However, the fact that the road system is deemed immoral on account of its consequences (the number of fatalities) places the Vision firmly within a consequentialist tradition. This might also have the unwanted side-effect of disregarding other values, which is a criticism that is often raised against consequentialism. A strict focus on “end-states”, in traffic as elsewhere, could lead us to disregard other values in the service of the desirable outcome. The end justifies the means. In the case of Vision Zero, some would argue that it could potentially threaten the liberty of individuals. This tendency is reinforced by the Vision’s explicit positioning of one good (life and health) firmly above all other benefits to society. Very few ethicists would support such a position, as it could be used to justify political systems that most of us find unacceptable.

Vision Zero does, however, seek to leave some of the other utilitarian considerations behind, and it does so in two distinct ways. For one thing, it requires the road authorities to seek to reduce the number of *fatal and serious* accidents, rather than seeking to reduce the total number of accidents. From an

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<sup>9</sup> In Norway, however, this shift in attitudes has not been as outspoken as in Sweden. On the contrary, the Minister of Transportation as well as Trygg Trafikk especially emphasises the importance of accepting that accident prevention will require “sacrifices” in terms of stricter controls and enforcement of existing rules, as well as potential new restrictions. The main focus of road safety work must remain “people, and people’s behaviour” (Skogsholm, 2002). The responsibility of the authorities has not been articulated as clearly as in Sweden, even though it is clearly part of the justification for new measures such as median guard rails on road with heavy traffic.

economic, or even welfare economic, point of view, this does probably not make sense. Second, it argues that driving speeds should be limited below what is economically optimal (in terms of time lost, transport costs etc.), if this gives a non-monetary reward in terms of increased road safety (Carlsson, 1999). The argument must be that loss of life and lasting loss of health are morally reprehensible, whereas minor injuries and inconveniences are not. Hence, unlike utilitarianism/welfare economics, the Vision does not accept that pleasure and pain are to be found on a continuum.

But the departure from utilitarianism is not restricted to the rejection of cost-benefit analyses. The focus on reducing serious accidents, rather than on reducing the level of risk, implies that more monies are spent on roads that carry more traffic. In practice, this means that roads that carry less traffic will on average become less safe, that is, the road users will take higher risks on lesser used roads. Thus: the road authorities also leave behind the conventional idea of fairness – as equally distributed risk – in favour of refusing to accept the idea that fatal risk is part of the equation. Fatal accidents are not justified in contractual terms, and thus risk of death cannot be justly distributed. (However, this could also be construed as a traditional utilitarian argument, on the basis of cost-benefit analyses. We might argue that ignoring the rights of the people driving on the less safe roads, is a typical result of using the consequentialist perspective of Vision Zero).

Vision Zero seems to imply a transition to a deontological type of ethics, but the subject of the deontological requirements has been slightly changed. It is no longer merely the road users who are seen as ethical subjects. We might claim that one tenet of our categorical imperative would have to be that we should never kill anybody. This seems reasonable, as most of us would prefer to live in a world where this was the general law. It might seem that a view like this would force us to do anything to prevent people from getting killed in traffic given that we were the relevant authorities in charge of road safety policy. The deontological stand against killing (“You should always act in such a way that you do not kill anybody!”) would then be equivalent to what Glover terms the “no trade-off view” of human life, which, as he describes it “gives an infinite value to not killing people”.

This, however, is not necessarily the case. The doctrine of double effect, which is frequently defended by supporters of deontological ethical systems<sup>10</sup>, contends that “it is always wrong intentionally to do a bad act for the sake of good consequences that will ensue, but that it may be permissible to do a good act in the knowledge that bad consequences will ensue”. Glover (1977), p. 87. If we accept this, we could say that given that our intention is to construct a good, solid, fair and efficient system of transportation, the fact that we *know* that the very same system is likely to kill hundreds of relatively innocent people every year does not turn it into wrongful conduct. Our intentions were, as it were, pure.

From a utilitarian point of view, the “no trade-off view” discussed above is obviously inconsistent. As Glover points out, such a conviction “commits us to giving the saving of a life overriding priority over all other social objectives. A

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<sup>10</sup> The doctrine of double effect originated in catholic theology (dating back to Thomas Aquinas), and was introduced into “mainstream” ethical philosophy by GEM Anscombe in the fifties.



piece of life-saving equipment is to be preferred to any amount of better housing, better schools or higher standard of living” (p. 57f).

We mentioned above how utilitarian arguments can support the greater suffering of a few for the more limited pleasure of the many, as it is the agglomerated *amount* of utility that counts, not its distribution. Arguably, this is what happens in the traffic system: the rather limited number of people who suffer loss from traffic accidents carry a disproportional share of the burden imposed by our traffic system, in order to facilitate convenient and comfortable mobility for the rest of us. It would therefore be perfectly feasible to construe a utilitarian argument in defence of our current road safety policy. Elvik (1999) has shown that the costs of actually preventing all serious traffic accidents would probably be so great as to lead to higher mortality in other fields, such as in hospitals. From a utilitarian point of view, this should be a definitive argument against the vision. A utilitarian would have to conclude that rather than being a *more* ethical approach to road safety, Vision Zero is a *less* ethically sound basis for policy. This argument could also be used within other ethical frameworks, as non-utilitarian approaches need not commit themselves to disregarding numbers altogether.

In summary, we could say that Vision Zero is a consequentialist approach to road safety, with the drawbacks that are associated with this position, among which the foremost is probably that the end is seen to justify the means. The “no trade-off” view reinforces this weakness. This means that it is the outcome of our actions, rather than the actions themselves, that are ascribed moral value. Arguably, such a position poses a danger as the position of the authorities in a political system, as undesirable acts can be justified with reference to the moral value of the end.

On the other hand, Vision Zero also introduces a new class of moral actors, in that the road authorities are held responsible for accidents in the road system. These requirements, however, are not deontological in nature, as they relate to the outcome of acts, and not to their inherent moral value. However, a more sympathetic reading of this would probably conclude that the road authorities are required to construct roads in such a way that they should not normally lead to serious accidents if road users conform to traffic law. There is nothing wrong in setting up such a requirement, but it does not follow from the fact that people die in traffic, from the standpoint of traditional deontological theories.

### 6.3 Public Space/Private Space/Professional Space

One of the arguments that have been marshalled in support of Vision Zero is that other potentially risky areas of society tend to have stronger reactions when serious accidents occur than is the case in for road traffic. A similar number of deaths in the workplace would have started an outcry, and even one death in a business company will often prompt major investigations and reorganization of routines. This is also evident for traffic accidents that involve other means of transport than cars. Accidents in rail or air traffic instigate public alarm as well as thorough procedures of investigation.

We should, however, be critical towards the idea that the very number of deaths in themselves makes the traffic system ethically unacceptable. It is not necessarily *in itself* ethically unjustifiable to allow hundreds of people to die in traffic every

year. As noted above, this will only follow from a strict consequentialist stance, and even then, only if the benefits do not exceed the harm. Death is, after all, a fact of life, and as a society we have to accept that people will die, for one reason or another. The number of people who commit suicide every year is considerably higher than the number of fatalities traffic<sup>11</sup>. Most people would agree that this is hardly an optimal state of affairs, but it is not given that it is unethical.

Obviously, there are two major differences between the two cases. For one, the responsibility of the authorities' is more visible in the case of traffic accidents, as they are directly involved in many phases of the process. Be that road quality and design, speed limits, traffic controls or car prices. The other difference is to do with our perception that suicide is chosen, and thus the responsibility of the individual. Both these objections, then, comes down to who is responsible for the incident in question. Each of these factors may in turn be complicated by asking whether the state may not still be responsible for the causes of the suicides (lack of psychological therapy, unemployment, etc), and whether exposing oneself to risk in traffic is not often at least partly voluntary.

Another major cause of "unnatural deaths" is various forms of substance abuse. Even Scandinavian social democracies allow hundreds of people to die every year as a consequence of consumption of alcohol or narcotics, conditions which are – in their later stages – only partly voluntary.

Looking at these examples, we might conclude that an underlying premise for the present discourse as well as state of affairs is that a risk-free society is neither conceivable nor desirable. In Norway, there exists a cherished tradition of using the great outdoors. People go skiing, trekking, fishing, swimming, and in some cases even base-jumping. Now, base-jumping is contested, but the other activities are certainly not risk-free in any sense. Every year a number of Norwegians, and usually some foreign tourists, perish in the mountains or at sea. In spite of this, there are relatively few calls for regulation, as risk seems to be accepted as an integral part of the activity.

As we have seen, the proponents of Vision Zero prefer not to compare road traffic to these areas, but to other professional fields, where fatalities are typically not deemed acceptable. But, arguably, the road traffic system cannot be straightforwardly compared to these professional areas, as they belong to different spaces: road traffic is (for most of the drivers) not a professional space.

This has been pointed out by the Norwegian Motorcycle Union (Hansen, 1997), who emphasises the persistent differences between systems that are often compared by the defenders of Vision Zero. The areas where a Vision Zero seems to have been achieved, such as rail and air transport, or private businesses, are highly professionalized and closed systems, with high barriers to entry and clearly defined objectives. In contrast, the road traffic system has low barriers to entry, and its objectives are to a large extent defined by its users. These are the basic guidelines of the system, and changing this would imply a very fundamental transformation of the transport system.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2003, 502 people committed suicide in Norway, while 280 were killed in road traffic. (Statistisk sentralbyrå)

Arguably, there are important and ethically relevant differences between all the areas discussed in this section. Whether we choose to compare traffic to the one or the other will often depend on our perception of how traffic *should* be viewed, and is therefore partly a political choice. If we choose to see traffic along the lines of the professional systems of air, rail, or professional life, we implicitly accept the premise that the road system should be more closed and professionalized than is the case today, and that the responsibility of the state should be expanded in an area where this was previously not considered appropriate. The role of the authorities is being transformed through the comparison to leaders of organisations who are not merely enablers, but also accountable for the well-being of those who are found in their systems. This analogy suggests that road authorities should be given more responsibility, but also more power, as the nature of their task is being reinterpreted. Conversely, it probably also implies that road users must give up some of their freedom.

Comparing the road system to other systems is therefore not merely an illustration of a point; it is a reconceptualisation of the road system and its place in society. Rather than Vision Zero following from its ethical arguments, the ethical arguments follow from adopting Vision Zero. The comparison is not arbitrary, but chosen. It is a choice to move the road system and its users into a more thoroughly public, professionalized and regulated sphere.

However, this view of road traffic seems to have rather strong support in society. Given that society accepts a higher number of deaths in some areas, and a higher level of risk in others, there must be other reasons why death in road traffic is deemed unacceptable by many. We might venture that one reason why fatalities in traffic cause outrage could be the idea that it could happen to just about anybody: the equal distribution of risk might be seen as an advantage in ethical terms, but might also make people more likely to respond to it, as it is directly relevant for their lives. This might make the public more willing to have the road traffic system moved from a more private to a more public sphere, where individual moralities are seen less relevant, even if this would imply giving up some liberties.

## 6.4 Ethics and Risk

Though the “democratic” distribution of risk may be one reason why the public is willing to accept strict measures in road safety work, there are also opposing forces at work. It is an acknowledged ethical problem that people do not seem to respond to the risk of death in the same way as they do to certain death. A society will typically be willing to invest more resources into saving identified victims (such as miners trapped in a mine, or hostages), than they are into preventing similar accidents in the future, even if their occurrence is statistically inevitable. This may have to do with the fact that “statistical lives” have no identifiable characteristics that we can identify with, or with the fact that people typically worry less about future than present misery (Glover, 1988). This is one reason why it is difficult to persuade people to put up with personal sacrifices (such as driving or speed restrictions) for the sake of road safety. Assuming that they will not be the ones who pay the price for liberty, individuals are unwilling to have restrictions imposed upon them for the sake of faceless others. One of the ethical

problems when dealing with risk is that it remains abstract. Although we can safely predict that quite a few people will die in traffic in the future, these remain abstract people, thus perhaps making it more difficult for authorities as well as for citizens to put a price on these people's head. (Or perhaps actually rendering it possible. It is no easy task to put a price tag on specific individuals, who we may prefer to think of as priceless.)

This, however, is not the only ethical problem caused by the introduction of risk into the equation. It is possible to understand the traffic system as a game with high stakes but good odds<sup>12</sup>. This metaphor, however, does not really work, as people do not necessarily play with the same odds: some people have significantly higher risk of dying or sustaining injury than others. Usually, it is assumed that people are somehow liable to others for the risks of harm or actual harms that they impose on them. This liability, however, will often be reciprocal in the traffic system: I impose as much risk of harm on you as you impose on me, and we may see the risks to be cancelling each other out (McCarthy, 1996). Obviously, this does not hold in cases where traffic law is broken by one of the parties – hence the punishment for imposing an undue risk in the system. We do, however not punish to compensate for the different levels of risk imposed by various groups of users of the traffic system. Potentially the system of taxes could in some cases be seen as an attempt to compensate for different levels of risk imposition.

High risk groups are for instance:

- 1) Motorcyclists (Elvik et al. 1997)
- 2) Cyclists (Elvik et al. 1997)
- 3) Pedestrians (Elvik et al. 1997)
- 4) Drivers between 18 and 23 (Bjørnskau, 2003)
- 5) Elderly people (Bjørnskau, 2003)
- 6) Car occupants who do not wear seat belts (Elvik et al. 1997)

In addition to these systematic variations, risks will vary according to skills and general traffic behaviour of individuals.

All of these factors serve to complicate the liberalist model of road safety. A further problem with allowing individuals to determine their appropriate level of risk in traffic is that they will then also implicitly determine the risks taken by others. It is an established fact that risk-tolerance differs considerably between individuals (a small group of white men seem to have a very much higher risk-tolerance than the rest of society, for instance.) (Slovic, 2000) However, with risks in the traffic system not being evenly distributed, this means that high-risk takers may hypothetically take a higher risk for others than for themselves.

Some of the groups listed above create higher risks for themselves through their own actions, or through lack of skills. We might be inclined to say that people who do not use their seat-belts have chosen to live with a somewhat higher risk (but then again, some of these are probably children, and may not have had a

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<sup>12</sup> Calculations show that in Norway, given average accident risk and average driving behaviour, a car driver will have to drive six average lifetimes in order to be injured in an accident, and these injuries will in most cases be light. (Vaa, 2002)

choice). The situation is more complicated when it comes to people with old cars, or small cars. Having a safe car was not necessarily an option for these people. (This again poses a new problem: is it necessarily ethically defensible for people to choose the biggest car possible, for the sake of safety. Granted, *their* safety is improved, but for those who might be hit by the car, the situation is the opposite – this might also be reinforced by risk compensation).

It is, however, also a fact that some groups of people will sustain more severe injuries from the same impacts than what is the “normal” level. Should we also take this into account when designing a traffic system? Should we try to distribute risks as evenly as possible, or should we try to distribute them according to desert? Should we accept that certain groups are at risk where others are not, simply because of their physical constitution?

If we take the game metaphor as a starting point, we also have the further complication that some of the players in the game do not pose much of a risk for others. This might mean that different standards should perhaps be applied for pedestrians, cyclists, and even, to some degree, motor cyclists. Those who do not pose risks might be said to have a more valid claim not to be exposed to risk.

One question that is very rarely asked, however, is what level of risk, or what level of safety is acceptable or sufficient. The focus has been on reducing the number of casualties, regardless of what the number is. Implicitly then, the present level of risk is deemed too high. This, perhaps is not surprising given that traffic accidents is one of the most important “non-natural” causes of death in Norwegian society (And being “in transport” is 4-10 times as risky – with regards to death and severe injuries - as other activities in general). The risk associated with driving car has probably never been lower than it is today, indeed, it has been significantly higher. The reason why we do not see a more significant reduction in the number of fatalities is that the amount of driving has been steadily increasing. Thus what people seem to oppose is the *number* of casualties rather than the level of risk. Provided that much of the increase in traffic has been voluntary, we might argue that people choose to expose themselves to this level of risk, and that it must therefore be acceptable, in so far as non-essential exposure is widespread.

The ethics of risk is complicated by the facts that objective risk does not – as Kristin Shrader-Frechette points out – exist. If we actually *knew*, it would not be risk, but certainty, and if we do not know, we do not call it risk. In a way, then, risk is nothing, because the actual realisation of the risk is not a percentage, but an either or. If you die, you die, if you live, you live. Many people would accept a quite different traffic system if they knew the present one would kill them, but then again, if they knew they would live, they would keep the present one.

Shrader-Frechette claims that the acceptability of risk is not merely a function of how high the risk is; other factors are ethically relevant. Thus she holds that factors such as equity, potential benefits, and whether the risk is chosen or imposed will also influence whether the level is acceptable. This can partly explain why people seem to react more strongly to risk of air or train traffic, as

passengers are passive victims rather than active participants. It could also serve as a defence for the status quo of road safety work<sup>13</sup>.

## **6.5 Asymmetrical Constraints**

Part of the background for Vision Zero is probably the argument against asymmetrical constraints: letting hundreds of people die in traffic every year is seen as being morally equivalent to killing them. Traditionally, this has been the view held by utilitarians, and indeed by all consequentialists. McCarthy (2000) argues that asymmetrical constraints must be morally acceptable from a utilitarian point of view, as a moral system with symmetrical constraints would discourage people to take responsibility for their own actions: if people were always morally responsible for preventing other people from harm, our moral system would provide no incentive to consider the consequences of one's own actions for one's own life. A moral system along such lines would not foster pension plans. "Any constraint in allowing harm can in principle be exploited to make someone else bear at least some of the costs of pursuing an end." (ibid. p. 757). The stronger the constraint the more exploitable it is.

*"A constraint on allowing harm is exploitable not only in cases where people can knowingly put themselves before threats of harm but also in cases where people can knowingly put themselves before risks of threats of harm. These are vastly more common." (ibid. p 758)*

A typical example of this would be risky traffic behaviour. Thus a similar argument can be construed when it comes to road safety: a road traffic system where the authorities stand responsible for all accidents in traffic, may serve to discourage drivers to assume responsibility for their own actions. Vision Zero is perhaps the most striking example yet of how one tries to construct a system in such a way that the actions of the individuals should not have serious consequences. One might imagine that in the long term, this might cause the individuals' feeling of responsibility to disintegrate. If we assume – as is likely to be the case – that the road traffic system will in the foreseeable future depend on the responsible behaviour of the road users, then there is a danger that the ideas behind Vision Zero can also cause the road traffic system to become less safe than it is today.

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<sup>13</sup> Such an approach could perhaps slightly change the focus of road safety policy, as it would seem to be more ethically essential to save those who do not have a choice when it comes to being exposed to risk. Examples could be children playing in their own neighbourhood, or regions where other means of transport are not available.

## 7 Summing up

In summary, we might conclude that Norwegian road safety policy has so far been based on the steady strengthening of the various standardised elements that go into the traffic system: the standardised driver, the standardised environment, and the standardised vehicle. The interplay between these various elements, once accepted, however, has been perceived as the responsibility of the road users. Within this system, the authorities' main responsibility has been to police and maintain the balance of the system. We have termed this approach "mitigated liberalism". As we have seen, valid arguments can be construed against the position that individuals are equipped to make their own moral choices.

Vision Zero breaks with this tradition, in not just merely wanting to "qualify" the individual road users in order to make them responsible and safe subjects, but also introducing the idea of a distributed responsibility. Although the Vision is sometimes presented as a contract between road users and road authorities, the fact that the system is seen as the locus of any failure, means that the system administrators must bear the brunt of the responsibility.

This report has argued that this involves treating the road system as a somewhat different sort of entity from what has usually been the case. In the traditional view, the road users are responsible for adapting to the road, whatever its condition. They have been carrying the entire responsibility for any accident. With Vision Zero, the road system is seen as an ongoing social action, not merely enabling, but actively shaping the interaction of road users. The Vision is often explained with reference to the hospital system, or professional life, where accidents (at least in theory) are not tolerated. These, however, are fields where you have explicitly given up very much of your own responsibility (and agency), and you are thus seen as somewhat "passive" in relation to what happens to you. You are subjected to the actions of others. This has not usually been how we have perceived the road system. Using the road system has traditionally been understood more – if not completely – along the lines of using the countryside: you are master of your own destiny, and as long as you do not subject others to undue risk, you are free to make choices, although within a firmly upheld system.

Thus Vision Zero, in the last instance, seems to be redefining the role of the kind of public sphere that is the road system; it is now presented as a sphere in which the authorities are constantly acting through the physical structure, and in which the road users give up some of their agency and are to some extent passive. We might say that rather than trying to construct a failsafe individual in an environment conceived as natural, the authorities now try to construct a failsafe environment, for individuals conceived as natural.

As we have seen, neither of the approaches to road traffic safety sketched above seems to be derived from one single basic ethical principle, even if Vision Zero presents life and health as an absolute good. They are pluralist approaches, mixing elements from several sources. The mitigated liberalist position mixes elements

from utilitarianism with deontological requirements, and Vision Zero makes use of consequentialist and what they term "normative" approaches (Tingvall og Lie, 2002), which in practice seems to mean some sort of deontological thinking, based on the inalienable right to life and health. As we have seen, this need not be an argument against either approach, as pluralism is viable, and perhaps even necessary in the current ethical climate.

The promoters of Vision Zero seem unwilling to allow utilitarian considerations to enter the equation, even though it is hard to see how that can be avoided in a situation with finite resources. Also some of the Vision's tenets are perfectly compatible with utilitarianism.

From a deontological perspective, we might argue that system-based approach is arguably not as inclusive as it should have been, as it seems to see the traffic system as closed off from the rest of society, which is, of course, an abstraction. Though the traffic system is a system, it is not a closed system, and it has serious repercussion for everybody in our society, even if there are marginal players in the system (such as children).

An even more holistic approach might open up for an entirely different set of ethical theories, where the questions posed are of a much broader character. One of the most popular ethical approaches of recent years is known as virtue ethics, as discussed above. The leading question in this ethical theory is not "what should I do?", but rather "What is the good life?". We might therefore argue that Vision Zero should have taken on more of a virtue ethical perspective.

We should perhaps also look into the possibility for creating a kind of principlism for road safety decisions, which would serve to make clear some of the conflicts that arise in road traffic safety work, and how they are weighted against each other in every single instance. Given that many different traditions and opinions must be taken into account, there is little reason to believe we could find one ethical theory that gives one definitive answer to the moral dilemmas surrounding road traffic.



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