

Saving lives in road traffic—ethical aspects

Abstract

Aim This article aims at giving an overview of five ethical problem areas relating to traffic safety, thereby providing a general framework for analyzing traffic safety from an ethical perspective and encouraging further discussion concerning problems, policies and technology in this area. **Subjects and methods** the problems presented in the article are criminalization, paternalism, privacy, justice and responsibility, and the reasons for choosing these are the following. First, they are all important areas in moral philosophy. Second, they are fairly general and it should be possible to categorize more specific problems under these headings. Ethical aspects of road traffic have not received the philosophical attention they deserve. Every year, more than 1 million people die globally in traffic accidents, and 20 to 50 million people are injured. Ninety per cent of the road traffic fatalities occur in low- and middle-income countries, where it is a growing problem. Politics, economics, culture and technology affect the number of fatalities and injuries, and the measures used to combat deaths in traffic as well as the role of road traffic should be ethically scrutinized. The topics are analysed and discussed from a moral philosophical perspective, and the discussion includes both theory and applications. **Results and conclusion** the author concludes with some thoughts on how the ethical discussion can be included in the public debate on how to save lives in road traffic. People in industrialized societies are so used to road traffic that it is almost seen as part of nature. Consequently, we do not acknowledge that we can introduce change and that we can affect the role we have given road traffic and cars. By acknowledging the ethical aspects of road traffic and illuminating the way the choices society makes are ethically charged, it becomes clear that there are alternative ways to design the road traffic system. The most important general conclusion is that discussion concerning these alternative ways of designing the system should be encouraged.

Keywords:Traffic safety. Ethics. Criminalization. Paternalism . Privacy. Risk . Justice . Responsibility