



# Knowing their place on the roads: What would equality mean for walking and cycling?



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## ABSTRACT

Trials and dangers faced by pedestrians and cyclists have not only created an impression of undesirable conditions, but have promoted arguments of injustice and inequality. High rates of death and injury coupled with reporting of poor infrastructure and fear of the behaviour of other road users point to a plausible *prima facie* concern that pedestrians and cyclists suffer inequalities. Yet this appearance masks uncertainty about what factors are relevant in judging inequality and how these should be treated against potentially competing claims. This article develops a framework assessing conditions for walking and cycling according to a theoretical conception of political and social equality, and so providing a basis on which to make arguments for change in transport policy, planning and law. In developing the framework we examine the relevance to equality of a range of factors, including measurement of road casualties, questions of responsibility to increase walking and cycling as means of contributing to pollution and carbon reduction, matters of fault and responsibility for road safety, and the economic impacts of improving conditions for walking and cycling.

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## 1. Introduction

The number of cyclists and pedestrians injured or killed in road accidents remains high despite some recent reductions (e.g. Roberts et al., 2002; WHO, 2009). Lives lost or harmed is cause for concern, and there are questions of whether pedestrians and cyclists face disproportionate risks, particularly as compared to drivers and passengers of motor vehicles. Coupled with this, a range of studies have argued that broad conditions faced by pedestrians and cyclists should be understood as forms of inequality, inequity, or lack of social justice. These claims relate to fear of crime, and problems of severance and inaccessibility, particularly to services, employment and education (Whitelegg, 1997; Acheson, 1998; Bostock, 2001; SEU, 2003). In this article we defend the argument that equality and social justice should be used to assess conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. However we suggest that it can be difficult to move from identification of inequity or inequality faced by pedestrians and cyclists to an understanding of how these problems can justifiably be addressed. Consideration of the relevance and policy implications of apparent inequalities tends to be complicated by social and environmental benefits of walking and cycling, coupled with arguments about the legitimacy or viability of measures which could improve conditions for these modes. To mediate competing claims, and to make a defensible case for measures to tackle inequalities facing

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pedestrians and cyclists, we argue for a philosophical conception of political and social equality which can be applied to policy, planning and law affecting walking and cycling.

This article was motivated by a three year project on *Understanding Walking and Cycling* which explored attitudes to, and experiences of, walking and cycling in four English cities. Its results suggested concerns that pedestrians and cyclists might face inequalities and certainly perceived that they did so (Pooley et al., 2011), but raised questions about how this could be adequately judged. To illustrate some of the complexity involved in judging the relevance of apparent inequalities, consider how alongside the mortality, injury, fears and risks associated with walking and cycling there are a range of individual and social benefits. There are prospects of benefits to health through exercise (e.g. de Hartog et al., 2010; Rojas-Rueda et al., 2011; Panis, 2011; Kahlmeier et al., 2011) and from improved local air quality if transport pollution is reduced (COMEAP, 2010), to the economy in congested areas (Eddington, 2006), and to carbon reduction (IEA, 2012; DECC, 2013). So, people might be encouraged to walk or cycle for self-interest reasons, especially for health benefits (e.g. de Hartog et al., 2010), or as acts of social responsibility (Blondel et al., 2011; Higgins, 2005). Yet even if the benefits mitigate risks and harms, there are questions about the reasonableness or plausibility of expecting uptake of walking and cycling if conditions are poor. Attempts at promotion are often coupled with attempts to improve conditions for walkers and cyclists (e.g. Pucher and Buehler, 2008; Hickman and Pharoah, 2011; Pooley et al., 2011), but questions remain about the sufficiency of improvements and the basis on which assessments of sufficiency should be made. These questions become more acute when measures to improve the lot of pedestrians and cyclists meet competing claims or concerns, for instance, that various restrictions on driving constitute an unjustified or politically problematic interference with individual choice (for instance, Hårsmann and Quigley, 2010; Docherty and Shaw, 2011; Khayesi and Amekudzi, 2011).

Recent years have seen developments in the use of political philosophy as a means of analysing questions in transport planning and policy (e.g. Wolff, 2002; Mullen, 2004, 2012; Beyazit, 2011; Martens, 2011, 2012; van Wee, 2011, 2012). However this work is still at relatively early stages and has tended to consider broad transport issues with consequent limitations to depth of debate and leaving significant questions about the application of political philosophy to specific areas. A function of this article is to extend and deepen this debate by considering the application of one philosophical approach, to one aspect of transport. So the scope is framed on one side by our limiting our investigation to walking and cycling as travel modes, and given their prominence, using motor vehicles as a comparison. While the framework we develop might be extended to other transport, we do not explicitly consider this extension. On the other side we have framed the philosophical questions as the application of a conception of equality. The overarching reason for this focus is that it responds to existing concerns that pedestrians and cyclists face certain inequalities, inequities or lack of social justice. Our contention is that a philosophical conception can provide a transparent framework capable of analysing and assessing the frequently competing concerns and claims surrounding policy and planning as it impacts on pedestrians and cyclists.

In the next section we outline a broad conception of equality, describing its context in political philosophy and briefly exploring its application to transport policy, planning and law. The subsequent sections investigate how this conception might be applied to walking and cycling by developing an analytic framework. The framework serves two purposes, first providing criteria for judging whether apparent inequalities faced by pedestrians and cyclists should be considered relevant policy concerns. Second, it provides a basis for judging how interests or claims of pedestrians and cyclists should be treated in the face of potentially competing concerns, such as interests of other road users, or questions of the economic impact of changes to support walking and cycling. In Section 3 we start to develop the framework, taking as a starting point the question of whether pedestrians and cyclists face disproportionate risks and levels of harm from road traffic collisions. We suggest our general account of transport and equality acts as a guide to using road casualty data in assessing relative levels of risks faced by transport mode. Moreover the account also indicates the multiple questions of equality left unanswered by examining casualty data alone. In Section 4 we begin to tackle these questions, considering how equality frames assessment of where responsibility for safety or pedestrians and cyclists should be placed. We argue that wider impacts of transport on carbon emissions, on other pollutants and on the economy, can be relevant to this question by indicating that there may be a collective responsibility to encourage walking and cycling and therefore to reduce the physical risks faced by pedestrians and cyclists. Finally in Section 5 we draw together the strands of the argument to develop a framework for judging the application of equal concern to walking and cycling.

## 2. Transport and equality

### 2.1. Theory of equality

Political philosophy has a tradition of argument about the definition and justification of equality as a notion underlying political, social and economic organisation. This stems at least from Aristotle (*Politics Book 3, XII*) and is illustrated by articles asking ‘Equality of What?’ (Sen, 1979; and for instance, Cohen, 1990; Daniels, 1990; Arneson, 2010), ‘What is Equality?’ (Dworkin, 1981a,b), ‘What is the point of equality?’ (Anderson, 1999). Debate on equality is ongoing, and any conception will be subject to criticism by non-egalitarians and by egalitarians defending a differing conception. So we aim to defend a theoretical account broad enough to be plausible to a range of opinion, while recognising the scope for debate. Thus we intend our argument to open up, rather than seek to settle discussion of equality and its application to walking and cycling.

We start from the notion that each person has equal moral value, and therefore that governance and policy should be designed to show equal concern for each person (e.g. Harris, 1988, 1997; Dworkin, 2000; Mullen, 2009; cf. Cohen, 1989;

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