

Transportation Justice, Participation and Urban Enlightenment

Keynote Presentation prepared for YHYS Colloquium: Sustainable Welfare

25-26 November 2021

Shane Epting, Ph.D. — Missouri University of Science and Technology

Thanks to the organizing committee and Aalto University



Preface:

Perspective: US-based sprawling cities (Dallas, Los Angeles)

Not my areas: planning, engineering, policy, math, etc.

Disciplinary Orientation: Philosophy. Focus: applied ethics

Planners and engineers deal with “is” and “should”

- but not “should” in a moral sense (mostly)
- which is what I’m doing in this presentation
- (mostly. . .)



Presentation Overview:

- Explore conceptual issues with transportation justice and the promise of “**moral ordering**”
- Examine the need for *meaningful* resident participation in urban mobility
- Show how to help facilitate “**urban enlightenment**” and illustrate why it is significant for socially just urban sustainability



Transportation Justice

Could we ever achieve it—considering the dynamic nature of a city?

Transport justice remains in a “toward” mode

Moral need to build & modify mobility systems for many stakeholder groups.

Identifying them is daunting!

But here it goes:



1. Marginalized groups and or vulnerable populations
2. Everyone else (i.e., the public)
3. Nonhumans (ecosystems, individual species)
4. Future generations (of humans)
5. Historical and cultural artifacts (buildings, bridges, parks)

“Moral Ordering”



Some Caveats

This order is suggestive, meaning that it should be followed in most instances.

Flexibility remains. Lower-ordered groups can move up when a pressing need or greater interest arises.

Moral ordering is not absolute.

It is an “anti-framework” framework.



What does moral ordering do?

Helps address the problem of moral prioritization

All groups deserve consideration, but not equally, of course.

Helps work towards equitable treatment for stakeholder groups.

(Theoretical roots are in environmental ethics.)



What if we ignore the problem?

Then: sidewalks deserve the same moral consideration as children?

Also, plants matter more than vulnerable people?

Non-existent people matter more than those living today?

Who wants to argue for those cases?



Transport planning focuses on anticipated mobility needs (Martens).

The status quo here fails to bring past injustices that still impact people today into view (e.g., Karel Martens).

Existing transportation systems perpetuate harm (Martens).

Considering this last point, mobility/transport decisions should start with historically marginalized groups for applicable cases.



If we want to acknowledge past mistakes, injustices, and shortsightedness, prioritizing these groups makes sense.

Other groups deserve consideration based on situatedness such as disabled persons or people with special needs.

Societies differ, and each society will need to determine which groups require prioritization *inclusively*.

Objection: But shouldn't decisions on **public** transport start with the **general public**?



Q: Why place marginalized and vulnerable persons first?

Protection of harms & benefits; requires a meaningful voice in policy decisions (i.e., environmental justice; Robert Figueroa)

Groups' historical, cultural, medical conditions show how preexisting circumstances require inclusionary efforts, exceeding the public's needs.

Designing and implementing means *securing* a place in the plans for them.

“Oh, it's too late!”

They *are* part of the public.

State-of-the-art transport systems should serve this purpose also.

Marginalized and Vulnerable Persons Endure:

Health impacts: respiratory disease **and death** from vehicle exhaust

Loss of time from time spent in transit

Takes away from family, education, recreation, errands, medical care.

“Geography of opportunity”

Developing networks

Mental life must focus on transport *as survival*



Disabled persons endure ridicule and harassment from passengers

Non-disabled persons occupying inappropriate seats

Indifferent bus drivers

Equipment/infrastructure in a state of disrepair; unsafe conditions

Examples: bus stops, sidewalks, platforms, hydraulic lifts on buses.



The Public Endures:

Traffic. . .

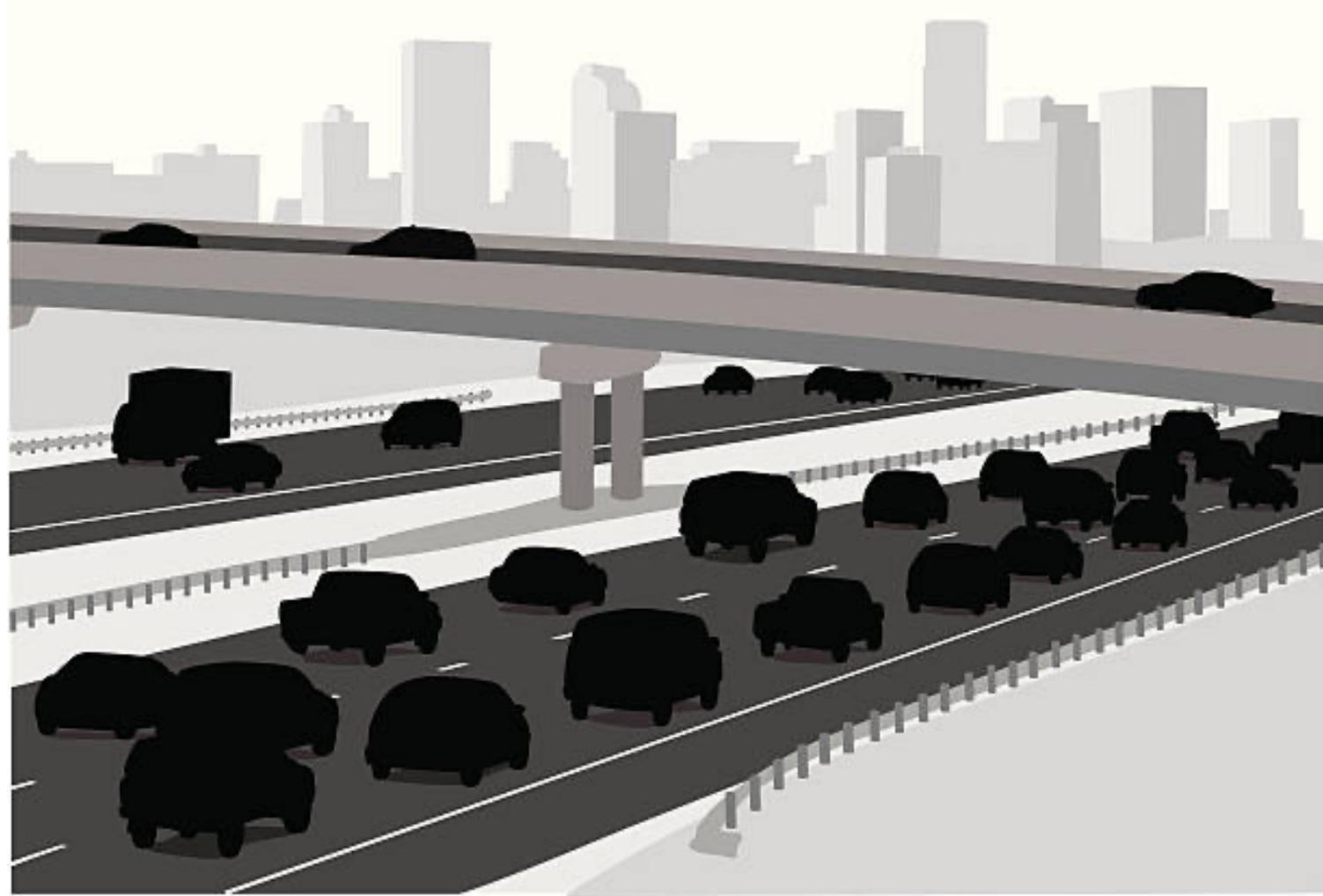
Road rage

Costs to operate a vehicle

Injuries and deaths

Pollution

For mass transit: super crammed subway cars



Tensions within the Public as a Group

Individual versus the group (ethical egoism v. utilitarianism?)

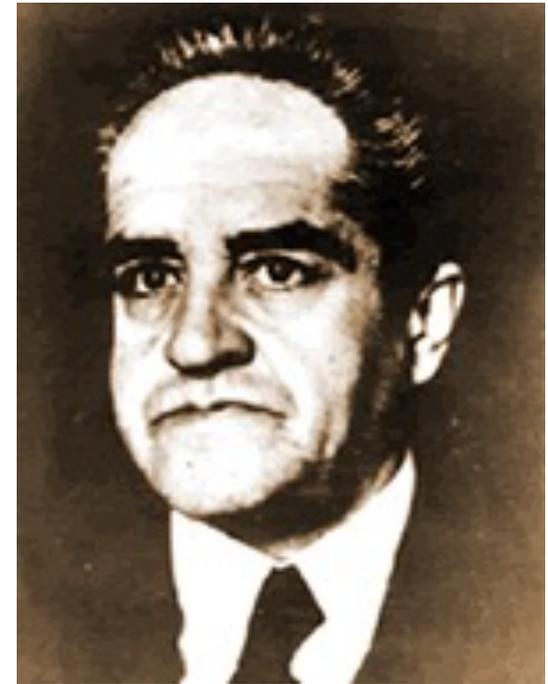
Person's rights against common good?

Cars versus transport?

How to ease this tension?



“The error of individualism and the error of socialism are very much alike because in their extreme forms...they ignore the quality of his [or her] spiritual reality. Individualism and communism lower the dignity of the person. Person and culture, however, are concomitant, for the person requires a society for his [or her] development. Society, in turn, needs the person for its very being.”

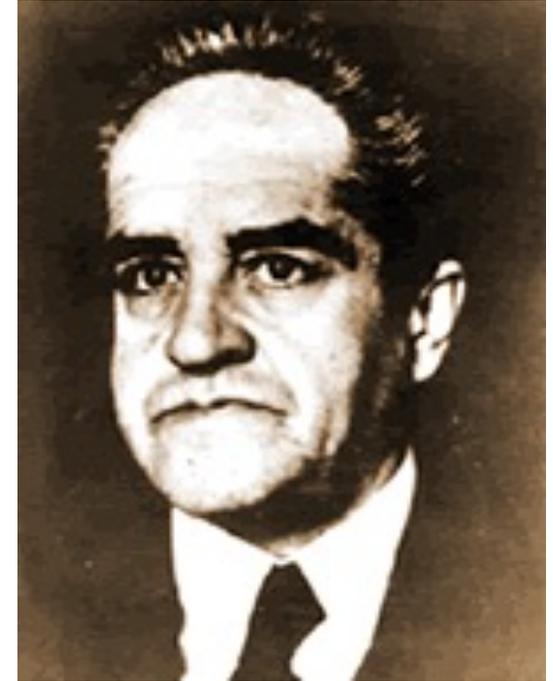


Antonio Caso
1883 - 1946

“Culture...implies a synthesis of values, and values are constant relationships reflected in thought and action...value must be the predominating influence in human consciousness. . .Humanity has forgotten love. It no longer thinks in works of charity, but of works of egoism.”

Q: What would it mean to design transport out of love?

Response: I think it would be fantastic.



Antonio Caso
1883 - 1946

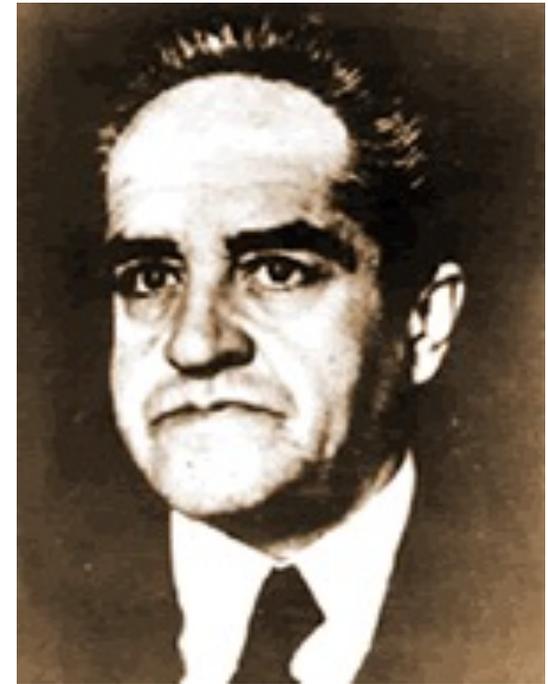
“We would like that each one be recognized for what he [or she] is: a human person. The idea of person requires respect because it implies respect.”

For Caso: Go beyond Golden Rule: Do more for others than you'd have them do for you.

What about respect?

Traffic Jams? Road rage? Crammed train cars?

They lower the dignity of a person.



Antonio Caso
1883 - 1946

Traffic. . .



Road Rage



Caso's thought Applied:

Should we build *another* lane for cars to “help” with traffic?

--> Earmark of transportation disrespect:

Monotechnical Saturation

“Relief Valve:”

Poly-technical Dispersion? Multimodal mobility?

Above my paygrade; a concern for transport professionals/scholars

Obligations to Non-humans

Instrumental value arguments

Intrinsic value arguments



Some Issues for Nonhuman Animals

Over a million animals die on US roadways per day

(Also impacts people and property through crashes)

Wildlife displacement via metropolitan growth & infrastructure

“Road ecology” is now an area of study and practice



Future Generations

Obligations to people who do not exist?

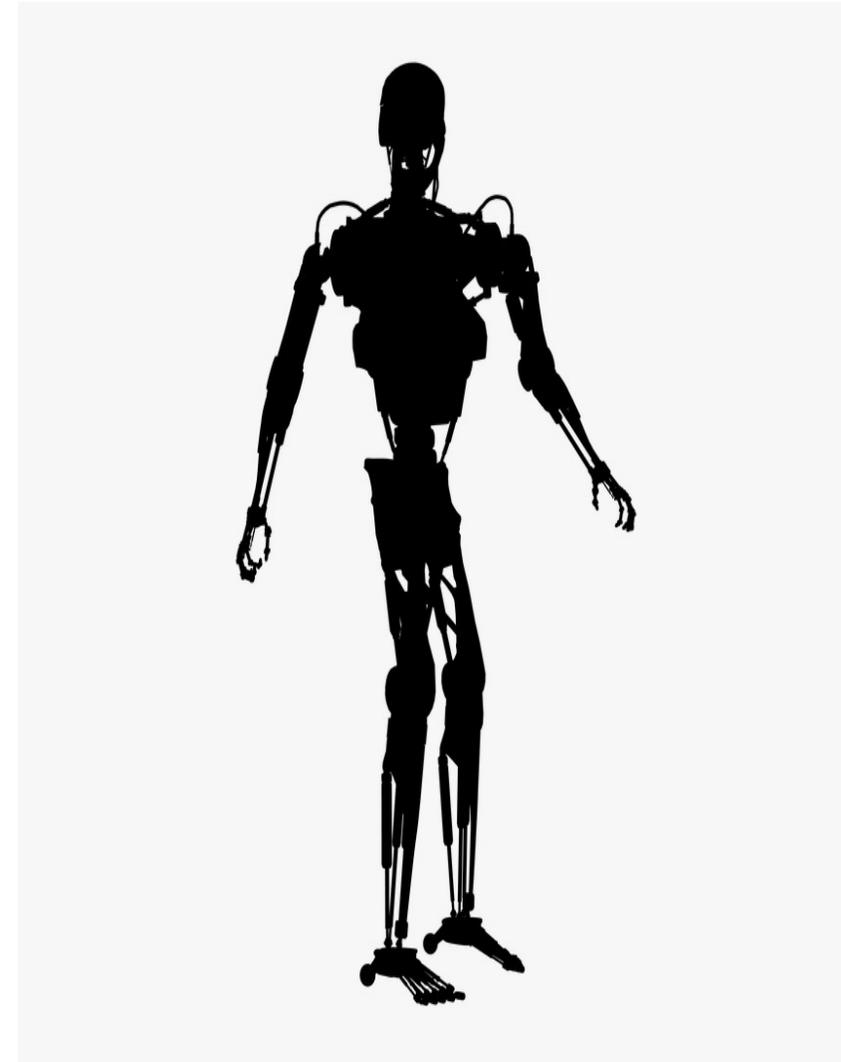
Solution?

Our interest in humanity's survival (Hans Jonas)

Objection!: you said to consider humans before nonhumans.

Contradiction?

Reply: the nonhumans in question exist; future humans do not *yet* exist.



Historical and Cultural Artifacts

Instrumental value, sure

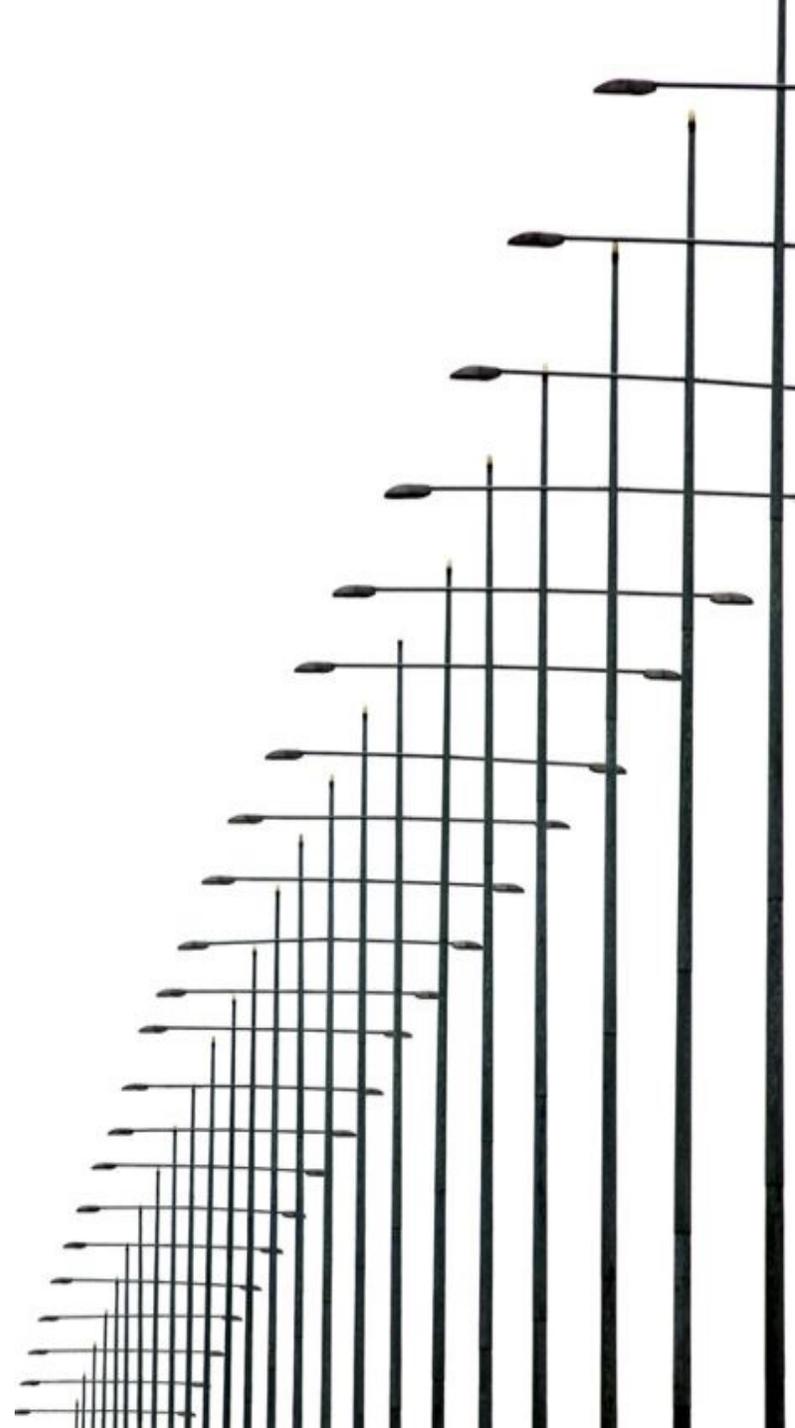
Intrinsic value?

We assign it to paintings and
historical documents.

Why not houses, bridges, ballparks, etc.?

Where is the limit? Dumps?

How can we build anything new?





Left: Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory, 610 N Jackson St, Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 113484. Right: OnMilwaukee © 2018.

Participation – Why do we need it?

Right to the city & it is an essential component of environmental justice as mentioned earlier.

Do planners and engineers have all of the vital information?
(Not without people's insights)

They need information on how transport affects their lives.

Can't access this information through shallow measures.

There should not be a tension between experts and people.



Transport justice groups fight to mitigate harm and against the unjust distribution of resources that come *from experts' designs and strategies*.

Which groups?

Bus Riders Unite!, Uprise, OPAL Environmental Justice Portland,
Transportation Justice Working Group, Urban Habitat



Over 100 years ago, George William Russell's insights emblemize one side of this tension, encapsulating its pith:

The desire to mess things and interfere is strong in the official oversoul, and at last a new generation of officials arise, more intellectual, better instructed, real experts in their way, and they begin the whole business of interference over again. Our theory, which we have often put forward, is that experts ought to be on tap and not on top.



Reasons why transportation specialists would not want to hear from the public

Keep us safe from dangers inherent to transportation systems.

Inefficient.

Most people lack technical training.

Gathering input demands too much time from residents.

People's views are partial *at best*.



Where is the pathway out of this situation, one that shows that experts and residents are not at odds?

How do we dissolve the tension?

Urban enlightenment



Urban Enlightenment

What is it?



Immanuel Kant



“Use one’s own understanding.”

Residents need to know how cities work.

Planners need to know how cities affect groups differently.

Why would people want to pursue urban enlightenment?

Do you love your city?

What does it mean to love your city?



We Love Helsinki -kollektiivin logo. Kuva: We Love Helsinki

YLE UUTISET

26.6.2012 • Päivitetty 26.6.2012 22:30



Seriously: what does it mean to love your city?
What is a city? People, structures, history, etc.

What does it mean to love someone? To love your family?
Your business?

Does it entail *knowing* them? Wanting the best for them, for
them to endure, to have a good life after you expire?



Understanding Urban Enlightenment

Process, not something one can achieve (cities always change)

Understanding your place and other groups' places in the moral order

Viewing moral order as it relates to worthwhile goals of the city

—such as *just* urban sustainability



Role of Municipalities and Transport Professionals

Create avenues for co-planning—updated version of participatory planning

It helps planners and residents move toward urban enlightenment.

Why transportation?

It is a major hindrance to escaping poverty, plus all the reasons mentioned previously.

After mobility, housing, infrastructure, food, water and sewage services, etc.



Do not cite without permission. This presentation is for theatrical purposes and references have been omitted for space.

For references, see Shane Epting (2021) *The Morality of Urban Mobility: Technology and Philosophy of the City* or contact the author at shane.epting@mst.edu

