Preface and acknowledgements

This book is written thanks to my faculty offering me a part-time sabbatical, in order to study ‘something other’ than my mainstream research focus (I hold a chair in Transport Policy). I chose the link between transport and ethics. What were the reasons for this decision?

A first motivation is my deep interest in multi-disciplinary research. After a (Dutch equivalent of a) Masters in geography, I have been professionally inspired by other disciplines, the most important being civil engineering, economics, psychology, environmental and managerial sciences. New job positions were the most important trigger for studying ‘new’ disciplines, but also my belief that both scientific progress, as well as the practical use of science, benefits from a multi-disciplinary (and in some cases an interdisciplinary) approach. In addition, ethics (and more broadly, philosophy) had been – up to undertaking the work that resulted in this book – almost completely absent in my research focus.

A second motivation comes from my experiences with Cost–Benefit Analysis (CBA). Although they are quite positive, I had the feeling that something was still missing. Part of my work relates to the ex ante evaluation of transport projects and policies. In most western countries mainstream economic reasoning is very dominant in ex ante evaluations of transport projects and policies, CBA being the most widely used framework for evaluation. I have supported the use of CBA in several roles, for instance in my work as a member of scientific committees, to check if CBAs for large infrastructure projects were made according to scientific insights and practical guidelines, but also by publishing on the strengths and weaknesses of CBA, and on options for further improvement. What has intrigued me for a long time is the strong resistance to, or even rejection of, CBA by some persons in (mainly but not exclusively) the practitioner community (such as some policy makers and members of interest groups). On the one hand, I cannot avoid the impression that for some it is purely the fact that they do not like the outcomes, and as a result reject the method of CBA out of self-interest. On the other hand, I think that some individuals do have good non-self-interest related reasons to debate the use of CBA for ex ante evaluations of transport projects and policies. However, they often were not able to make them explicit. Various discussions have given
me the impression that ethical questions such as fairness or equity were behind some of the feelings of discomfort experienced by some of those individuals, and I could well understand these feelings.

The third reason is the motivation to do ‘something’ in some form of collaboration with people from another group in our faculty, preferably a well-respected group that I had not collaborated with previously. In this context, our faculty has a very strong group in the area of philosophy.

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