

Preface

Around the turn of the millennium, a young woman with outstanding academic achievements in science and mathematics applied to study engineering at a European university. She had chosen to study engineering particularly because of the opportunities she expected it would give her to make a contribution to the wellbeing of others. It happened that the university engineering department to which she applied had just been involved in the design of a vehicle for a world speed record attempt. When the young woman visited the university for interview this “triumph of technology” was presented as being a quintessential example of good engineering. However, though it was clear to her that the vehicle was technically ingenious, she also recognised that it was of no practical use. She concluded that she had misunderstood the nature of engineering, and still wishing to help others she changed her plans and studied medicine, at which she assuredly excelled.

This young woman’s change of career was undoubtedly a specific loss for engineering. Additionally, it had a broader, tragic dimension; for her understanding of the purpose of engineering was more mature than that of the academics she encountered. Moreover, their imbalanced prioritisation of technical ingenuity over helping people is not uncommon within parts of the profession. The primary thesis of the present book is that a major challenge for engineering is to develop an aspirational ethical ethos that redresses this imbalance, and an outline of such an ethos will be presented. We particularly need to identify, promote and fulfil the *ethical opportunities* which engineering gives.

I am very grateful for the many discussions with colleagues which have benefited the development of the themes of this book, and also for the invitations to lecture on these themes to both engineers and philosophers – having to respond to audience questions is a very effective incentive to sharpen one’s clarity of thought. I particularly wish to thank Iselin Eie Bowen for perceptive comments throughout the development of this work, and Espen Eie Bowen for careful reading of the final draft of the text. During the final preparation the encouragement and very

rapid replies to my queries of Anthony Doyle and Simon Rees at Springer London have been much appreciated.

In his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle noted three possible dominant motivations in an individual's life: pleasure, honour and contemplation. I would suggest that he omitted one important and rarer dominant motivation: to care for others. The present book seeks to set forth the case for caring for others as a motivation in professional life. I would like to dedicate it to one for whom the care of others has been the primary motivation throughout her life: Anna Jøssang Eie.

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