

The Right Thing to Do

*An Ethics Guide for
Engineering Students*

P. Aarne Vesilind

2nd Edition

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engineering students

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To the Student

Learning engineering ethics when one has never been an engineer is much like learning to drive without ever getting into a car. If you want to learn to drive, you can read the manual and know that there is such a thing as a steering wheel and a brake and other gadgets, and somehow they are all used to drive the car, but you cannot really appreciate the experience until you actually get into the car, grab the wheel, and turn the key. It's the same with engineering ethics. Ethics in engineering is immediate and ubiquitous in every engineer's daily life. Engineers understand very well what demands ethics places on their profession. But you, the engineering student, probably have only a cursory understanding of what engineering is all about, and you cannot be expected to understand engineering ethics any more than you could be expected to drive without having actually done so.

Why then learn about professional ethics at the beginning of your engineering career? There actually are some good reasons to do so. First, the objective is to make sure you know that there **is** such a thing as ethics and that ethics is a part of your everyday life in your role as a student. Second, we hope you will learn something about how ethical decisions are made and that you become aware of some useful techniques for helping you make good decisions. If we can get to that point, then the next step – the appreciation of engineering ethics – is easy. Engineering ethics is simply another layer of ethical responsibilities you inherit when you start to practice your profession. But the moral decisions you make as a student are really not that much different from the decisions you will make as an engineer. If you can learn to recognize ethical problems in your everyday life as a student and learn to solve them, then you will be well on your way to understanding engineering ethics once you become an engineer.

In that spirit, we offer this small book. Now grab the wheel, insert the key, and let's roll!