
Chapter XV

Privacy Perspective from Utilitarianism and Metaphysical Theories

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ABSTRACT

The Internet is a hot issue nowadays because of its important role at different levels. The topic of privacy is a debatable issue: we read in the research field scholars for and against applying this concept in real life and how to deal with it. Most researchers mainly focus on this subject from a social studies perspective. This chapter takes a new approach and discusses this issue from a philosophical perspective where we use two ethical theories (Mill & Kant) to raise the important relevant points regarding this subject.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet, which is the revolution of information technology, has initially been used for research and advancements in scientific fields through connecting scholars around the continent. However, the open environment of such use, and the enormous

advantage that provides for the scientific sector, made the need for such use highly urgent from the private high management levels. Therefore, difficulties are introduced as a result of the flexible environment this technology provides, such as eavesdropping, password sniffing, data modification, and spoofing (Bhimani, 1996).

Still, the scholars in the field have not agreed upon definition of the privacy concept (Alter, 1998; Laudon & Laudon, 1994; Reiter & Rubin 1999; Wang, Lee, & Wang, 1998). Laudon and Laudon (1994) define privacy as the lonely condition that people ask for to be away from other individuals, institutions, or governmental surveillance. Moreover, Wang, Lee, and Wang (1998) identify four characteristics of privacy:

1. Solitude
2. Intimacy
3. Anonymity
4. Reserve

On the other hand, Milberg et al. (1995) focus on the legal aspect of the privacy issue. Their study identifies the relationship between privacy and the given society's heritage of knowledge. This means that societies differ according to their understanding of privacy. In addition, other researchers (Sipior & Ward, 1995; Weisbank & Reining, 1995) give more attention to the legal issue of privacy. Specifically, they study the legal perspective of email, the most important tool facilitated by the Internet. Their argument is that email is a sensitive tool for both sides (i.e., employee and employer). The employer provides this tool to facilitate its employees' job related tasks. However, employees consider it part of their legal rights and a private tool that should not be intervened with by outsiders, including their employers. Other studies concentrated on the technical aspect of privacy and how technology can be formulated to maintain people's privacy (Bernassi, 1999; Clarke, 1999; Gabber et al., 1999; Goldshlag et al., 1999; Reagle & Cranor, 1999; Reiter & Rubin, 1999).

In this chapter, we concentrate on the convergence point which plays the important part of the communication technology revolution and on the ethical standards that the users are asked to respect and obey. Precisely, this chapter gives more attention to the limits of the legitimacy of violating the privacy of other parties. The paper is divided into four sections. First, the chapter concentrates on the concept of privacy in general and information privacy in particular. Then, it presents John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* and examines how it offers a solution to the ethical problems. Next, the chapter introduces Immanuel Kant's theory of ethics. The chapter then deals with the ethical issues of privacy from the two theories' points of view and whether these theories are capable addressing all Internet and technology privacy-related cases. Finally, the last section contains recommendations and a conclusion.

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