Chapter 4
Ethics of Security:
From Personal Safety to Cyber Security

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to identify and analyse the ethical problems of security, particularly cyber and digital threats. The concepts of security and safety are defined based on existing literature. The chapter addresses the key results and research gaps in the field (i.e., security issues in different areas) and future challenges, both theoretical and empirical. Moreover, the discussion is linked to an analysis of the relationship between utilitarian ethics and deontological ethics, which brings a new perspective to the debate on security ethics in general and cybersecurity. Finally, comprehensive security and absolute safety ideas are discussed, which sheds new light on the complexity of security concerns.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter identifies and analyses the ethical problems of security, with special reference to cyber and digital threats. Amid the growing global threats of climate change and economic inequality, one might find it tempting to define ethics as prescriptions to prevent humans from hurting each other and the rest of the biosphere. From this it can be deduced that ethics is essentially about security, in various forms, and that other important aspects of ethics such as fulfilling one's duties, developing virtues and character strengths, feeling empathy and reinforcing pro-social behaviours ultimately serve the same goal: security, both personal and collective. This view means that the ethics of security is not merely a subfield or special area of ethics, but the core and epicentre of ethics. However, it is possible to remark that emphasising security easily leads to employing ethics as a means to an end, which anchors ethics firmly in one particular paradigm and tradition, namely utilitarianism or consequentialism. To this, the reply can be that nothing automatically forces one to formulate and establish ethics in general, or the ethics of security in particular, merely based on utilitarian premises, but also other theories such as deontological ethics, contractarianism, virtue ethics and care ethics play an important role in the ethics

of security (see Table 1). The contribution of different ethical theories to security considerations will be discussed in this chapter.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) included the phrase *human security* in its 1994 report, which triggered a debate about the perception of security. That debate has challenged an earlier understanding of security that emphasised the sovereignty of national states, the importance of defence politics and international negotiations and treaties (Martin & Owen, 2015, 1). The present understanding of human security hovers around human development and human rights and even national security, but it is wider than any of them alone (Sen, 2015, 18). In addition to these wide-ranging issues, Amartya Sen points out a much more narrow and personal interest in security: the majority of people are concerned with the security of their own lives and of the lives of their family members (ibid.). Sen emphasises that this general concern has to be addressed and any understanding of security can be integrated with it to the extent that this makes human life more secure. Such an integrative understanding of human security is important precisely because it affects human lives. National security and global security alone, without the integration with an individual's "world of experience", are more abstract entities and, often, more remote from everyday life. These political forms of security are frequently defined in terms of military or ecological preparedness and other modes of national and international problem-solving.

With security being a matter of personal interest, it is worthy to pay attention to the underlying psychological background. Scholars in various fileds have argued that security is a basic human need (Maslow, 1943, p. 376–380; Staub, 2003, p. 2; Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 214–213). Famously, Maslow ranked security or safety as a psychological need second to the basic physiological needs such as air, water and food. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often represented as a pyramid in which the bottom represents basic biological drives for survival (Figure 1). Other basic needs, such as the need for safety, love, esteem and self-actualisation, are also universal, but not absolutely necessary for survival. Moreover, a desire to sacrifice oneself for others does not necessarily go against the need for survival or safety, because self-sacrifice can serve the greater good of the survival and safety of a collective, such as a family, clan, race or nation. However, the higher one climbs in the hierarchy of needs, as more specific desires are addressed along the way, the more suspicious one may become of the universality of human needs. Maslow (1943, p. 389) said, "Certainly in any particular culture an individual's conscious motivational content will usually be extremely different from the conscious motivational content of an individual in another society. However, it is the common experience of anthropologists that people, even in different societies, are much more alike than we would think from our first contact with them, and that as we know them better we seem to find more and more of this commonness".

DEFINITIONS

With these background remarks in mind, the concepts of *security* and *safety* need to be defined and analysed. No concept exists in isolation from other concepts and linguistic practices (Gasper, 2015, 33). Therefore, to understand *security* and *safety*, it is necessary to be familiarised with the real-world contexts of users and audiences of those words, purposes within those contexts and accumulated patterns of use

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