

count would most likely be a waste of time and talent because if this person was sufficiently smart to hack into Skype, he could probably have hacked into Amazon, Dell, or maybe even a credit card account, and gotten much more value for his time. Rather, I imagine that this person was a smart kid who had managed to hack into my account and who took advantage of this “free” communication by calling anyone who would talk to him until I managed to regain control of my account. He may have even seen this as a techie challenge—or maybe he is a student to whom I once gave a bad grade and who decided to tweak my nose for it.

Would this kid have taken cash from my wallet, even if he knew for sure that no one would ever catch him? Maybe, but I imagine that the answer is no. Instead, I suspect that there were some aspects of Skype and of how my account was set up that “helped” this person engage in this activity and not feel morally reprehensible: First, he stole calling time, not money. Next, he did not gain anything tangible from the transaction. Third, he stole from Skype rather than directly from me. Fourth, he might have imagined that at the end of the day Skype, not I, would cover the cost. Fifth, the cost of the calls was charged automatically to me via PayPal. So here we had another step in the process—and another level of fuzziness in terms of who would eventually pay for the calls. (Just in case you are wondering, I have since canceled this direct link to PayPal.)

Was this person stealing from me? Sure, but there were so many things that made the theft fuzzy that I really don’t think he thought of himself as a dishonest guy. No cash was taken, right? And was anyone really hurt? This kind of thinking is worrisome. If my problem with Skype was indeed due to the nonmonetary nature of the transactions on Skype, this would mean that there is much more at risk here, including a wide