Private and Public Duty in the Near Future

In this essay, I will explore the ethical decisions made in “Mech” by C.J. Cherryh. The most important type of normative ethics seen in this short story is deontology. A deontologist is someone who is obligated to abide by the rules with specific duties and principles. Rules and duties guide the deontologist’s choices in what to do in a situation of stress, and stress is serious factor in how crimes are solved in the world of “Mech.” Sheila and Dave are police officers in Dallas on patrol at night in the near future; Sheila is the driver, the keyman, while Dave is the tracker, or the mech—heavily armed. Dave is sent in his armored suit to investigate a possible domestic assault case in a wealthy hi-rise apartment complex, and he and his partner stumble into a crime scene that has national, maybe interplanetary, implications. Dave’s duties are split: he has a duty to uphold the police code and must swing to yellow if his visor lights up in a certain direction, yet he is also committed to Sheila who is plugged into vital information that keeps him alive.

Dave survives the tense chase for the unknown “live-in” by following two duties. While these seem to indicate a parallel set of loyalties, the story provides more evidence that survival is based on close interpersonal connections to teammates, partners. Dave follows Sheila’s directions perfectly even though they do not make sense. Further, Dave lies to an officer and they both evade police regulations. Duty to humans takes priority over duty to general rules and regulations. First, I will explore the secret signals such as “mustard” between Dave and Sheila, then I will examine Ross’s death. Lastly, I will try to unpack their offline conclusion of what happened to Nolan, the live-in, and Ross, and why they are not arrested or even questioned—even though a double killing just occurred. In the end, by looking at scenes of death, secrecy, and personal loyalty, we can see that relying on people is more important than relying on rules.