

KANT ON KEEPING A SECRET

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Although what Kant has to say about lying (and deception) has received a certain amount of attention from Kant scholars, what Kant has to say about keeping secrets has received scant attention. Indeed, the topic of secret keeping has received much less attention from philosophers than it should have. With the exception of Sissela Bok's important book, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (1983), little is specifically devoted to the topic. This article, I hope, will go some way towards remedying the situation. In this article I will advance a definition of a keeping a secret, and I will turn to Kant to consider the question of whether it is always, sometimes, or never immoral to keep a secret.

THE DEFINITION OF KEEPING A SECRET

Bok has said the following about keeping a secret:

Anything can be a secret so long as it is kept intentionally hidden . . . It may be shared with no one, or confided on condition that it go no farther; at times it may be known to all but one or two from whom it is kept. To keep a secret from someone, then, is to block information about it or evidence of it from reaching that person, and to do so intentionally: to prevent him from learning it, and thus from possessing it, making use of it, or revealing it.¹

According to Bok, a secret is information that is “kept intentionally hidden” from others. To keep a secret, therefore, is to intentionally keep information hidden from others. It is to intentionally prevent another person from acquiring information. Since to keep information hidden from another person is simply to keep information from another person, I shall render this as the following definition:

To keep a secret (from another person) = *df.* to intentionally keep information (from another person).

One point should be noted about this definition. Since ‘keep’ is a success verb, it follows that ‘keep a secret’ is a successful act. One does not ‘keep a secret’ from another person if, despite one’s every attempt, one fails to keep information from that other person. It is possible, therefore, to attempt to keep a secret from someone, and to fail. To clarify this point, I shall provide a definition of what, according to Bok, is attempting to keep a secret, where ‘attempt’ is necessarily an intentional verb:

To attempt to keep a secret (from another person) = *df.* to attempt to keep information (from another person).

Bok is correct that keeping a secret is necessarily an *intentional* act. One does not keep a secret from another person if one simply forgets to inform another person about something. However, I consider Bok’s definition of keeping a secret, and consequently, her definition of attempting to keep a secret, inadequate, for two reasons. The first is that, strictly speaking, information is necessarily true. ‘False information’ is a contradiction in terms. Hence, according to Bok’s definition, only what is *true* can be kept secret from others. That is to say, secrets can only be true. However, surely this is false. Surely keeping a falsehood, one that is, however, believed to be true, from another person counts as keeping a secret from that other person.

The second reason I consider Bok’s definition to be inadequate is that not all intentional withholding of information (or believed-information) from others is keeping a secret from others. One may intentionally keep information (or believed-information) from others simply because one believes that sharing information (or believed-information) is not required, in the context of the conversation (or more generally, the interaction) that one is having.

Two things need to be distinguished here. The first is that sharing *everything* that one believes (or knows),² even about one matter, on any particular occasion, is impossible: “Even with the greatest possible will to candor, we would be hard put to express our version of ‘the whole truth’ on any matter, let alone express ‘everything we believe’ at any one time.”³ The second is that sharing *as much as possible* of what one believes, even about a single matter, on any particular occasion, is normally not required, in the context of a conversation.

There are at least two ways in which sharing as much as possible of one’s believed-information may not be required in the context of some conversation. Hence, there are at least two ways in which I may believe that sharing as much as possible of my believed-information is not required in the context of some conversation. First, it may be that the believed-information has nothing to do with the conversation at hand. As a result, it may be that sharing the believed-information may not be required. If I believe that the believed-information has nothing to do with the conversation at hand, then I may believe that sharing the believed-information may not be required. For example, I may believe (truly) that I must pick up my shirt from the dry cleaners. However, I may intentionally not tell my colleagues in my department, with whom I am conversing about some departmental matter, that I must pick up my shirt from the dry cleaners. If, as a result, they never learn of my errand, this act of intentional non-disclosure may nevertheless not be the act of keeping of a secret. The conversation we are having, I may believe, has nothing to do with my errand. As a result, I may not believe that I am required to share this information about my errand with them.

Secondly, it may be that all of the *details* of the believed-information are not important to the conversation at hand. As a result, it may be that sharing the details of the believed-information is not required. If I believe that the details are not important to the conversation at hand, then I may believe that sharing those details is not required. For example, if we are making plans to meet up to talk about some matter, I may tell you that I have to run an errand beforehand. I may intentionally not tell you that the errand is to collect my shirt from the dry cleaners. If, as a result, you never learn what errand it is that I have to run, this act of intentional non-disclosure may nevertheless not be the act of keeping of a secret. I may believe that the details of my errand are not important, and hence, I may believe that I am not required to share these details with you. I may believe that all that is necessary for

you to know is that I have to run an errand, and that we will have to meet after I have completed this errand.

Paul Grice has argued that people who are conducting a conversation, under normal circumstances, should adopt the following maxims (or norms) of conversation⁴:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
3. Try to make your contribution one that is true.
4. Do not say what you believe to be false.
5. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
6. Be relevant.
7. Be perspicuous.
8. Avoid obscurity of expression.
9. Avoid ambiguity.
10. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
11. Be orderly.

With respect to the second norm of conversation, Grice is correct that one ought not to be “more informative than is required” with others in a conversation. There is such a thing as providing others with ‘too much information,’ where this sometimes means telling them anything at all. With respect to the first norm of conversation, Grice is also correct that one ought to be as informative as is required for the “current purposes of the exchange” with others. Despite its having the form of a positive requirement, it is important to understand that this norm is a restricted norm: it is the norm of being *only* as informative as is required by the conversation.

As Grice presents them, both of these norms refer to being ‘informative.’ However, I shall not restrict their meaning to only that which is true. One may violate the first norm, I shall hold, by providing another person with too much believed-information, when, unbeknownst to one, it is false. One may also violate the second norm, I shall hold, when one fails to provide another person with enough believed-information, when, unbeknownst to one, it is false. Consequently, I shall dub the first norm as the norm of over-believed-informativeness, and I shall dub the second norm as the norm of believed-informativeness.

Normally, the norm of believed-informativeness does not entail telling others everything that one is able to tell them. Although it is possible to imagine situations in which what is re-

quired is that one tells others everything that one is able to tell them, for example, in a police investigation when one is a witness to a crime, this is normally not the case. For that reason, one is not attempting to keep a secret from others when one intentionally does not give others some believed-information that one could give them because one believes that giving it is not required by the conversation at hand, either because one believes that it has nothing to do with the conversation at hand, or because one believes that it is a detail that is not important to the conversation at hand. That is, one is not attempting to keep a secret from others when one simply abides by the (restrictive) norm of believed-informativeness.

Attempting to keep a secret, therefore, involves something different from abiding by the (restrictive) norm of believed-informativeness. Attempting to keep a secret, I contend, involves intentionally violating the norm of believed-informativeness. It involves being intentionally less believed-informative than one believes is required by the conversation (or more generally, by the interaction) at hand. To attempt to keep a secret, I contend, is to intentionally tell others less than one believes is required by the conversation (or more generally, by the interaction) at hand. To put it more formally, in the form of two definitions:

(D1) *A* keeps a secret from *B* = *df.* *A* intentionally keeps some believed-information from *B* that *A* believes *A* is required to give *B* by the norm of believed-informativeness (viz., ‘Make your contribution as informative as is required [for the current purposes of the exchange]’).

(D2) *A* attempts to keep a secret from *B* = *df.* *A* attempts to keep some believed-information from *B* that *A* believes *A* is required to give *B* by the norm of believed-informativeness (viz., ‘Make your contribution as informative as is required [for the current purposes of the exchange]’).

It is important to note that, according to D1 (and to D2, *mutatis mutandis*),⁵ keeping a secret from another person necessarily involves intentionally keeping from the other person believed-information that one *believes* (whether truly or falsely) one is required to give the other person by the norm of believed-informativeness. According to D1, it is not the case that keeping a secret from another person necessarily involves intentionally keeping believed-information from the other person that one *is* required to tell the other person by the norm of believed-informativeness.

According to D1, therefore, one is *not* keeping a secret from another person if one intentionally keeps believed-information from the other person that one does not believe one is required to give to that person by the norm of believed-informativeness, even if one is required to give it to that person by the norm of believed-informativeness (or, equivalently, one is *not* keeping a secret from another person if one intentionally keeps believed-information from the other person that one falsely believes one is not required to give that person by the norm of believed-informativeness), and the other person does not get it.

However, according to D1, one *is* keeping a secret from another person if one intentionally keeps believed-information from the other person that one believes one is required to give that other person by the norm of believed-informativeness, even if one is not required to give it to that other person by the norm of believed-informativeness (or, equivalently, one *is* keeping a secret from another person if one intentionally keeps believed-information from the other person that one falsely believes one is required to give to that other person by the norm of believed-informativeness), and the other person does not get it.

It may be that I do not believe that some believed-information has something to do with the conversation I am having with another person (or, equivalently, it may be that I believe that some believed-information has nothing to do with the conversation I am having with another person), even though it does. It may be that I not believe that it is required (or, equivalently, that I falsely believe that it is not required) by the norm of believed-informativeness that I give it to the other person, even though it is required. It may be that I intentionally keep believed-information from the other person, even though the norm of believed-informativeness requires me to give it to the other person, and the other person does not get it. In this case, I have *not* kept a secret from that other person.

It may also be that I falsely believe that some believed-information has something to do with the conversation I am having with another person, even though it does not. It may be that I falsely believe that it is required by the norm of believed-informativeness that I give it to that other person, even though it is not. It may be that I intentionally keep the believed-information from the other person, even though the norm of believed-informativeness does not require me to do so, and the other person does not get it. In this case, I *have* kept a secret from that other person.

It is also important to note that, according to D1, keeping a secret from another person necessarily involves intentionally keeping believed-information from another person that *one* believes one is required to give the other person, by the norm of believed-informativeness. According to D1, it is *not* the case that keeping a secret from another person necessarily involves intentionally keeping believed-information from the other person that the *other person believes, or would believe*, one is required to tell the other person, by the norm of believed-informativeness.

It may be that I do not believe that some believed-information has something to do with the conversation I am having with another person (or believe that it does not have something to do with the conversation), even though the other person believes, or would believe, that it does. It may be that I do not believe that it is required (or believe that it is not required) by the norm of believed-informativeness that I give it to the other person, even though the other person believes, or would believe, that it is. It may be that I intentionally keep it from the other person, even though the other person believes, or would believe, that the norm of believed-informativeness does requires me to do so, and the other person does not get it. In this case, I have *not* kept a secret from that other person.

It also may be that I believe that some believed-information does have something to do with the conversation I am having with another person, even though the other person does not believe, or would not believe, that it does (or believes, or would believe, that it does not). It may be that I believe that it is required by the norm of believed-informativeness that I give it to the other person, even though the other person does not believe, or would not believe, that it is (or believes, or would believe, that it does not). It may be that I intentionally keep it from the other person, even though the other person does not believe, or would not believe, that it is required (or believes, or would believe, that it is not required) by the norm of informativeness that I do so, and the other person does not get it. In this case, I *have* kept a secret from that other person.

Another way to make these points is to say that, since keeping a secret is an intentional act, one is not keeping a secret unless one *believes* that one is keeping a secret, and, furthermore, one *is* keeping a secret when one *believes* that one is keeping a secret, and the believed-information is kept from the person. Believing that one is keeping a secret is necessary for keeping a secret, and, in conjunction with the believed-information being kept from the person, is sufficient for keeping a secret.

With these definitions of keeping a secret, and attempting to keep a secret, in mind, it is now possible to turn to the question of the relationship between keeping a secret and deception.

KEEPING A SECRET VS. DECEPTION

Nagel has said that intentionally not telling others everything that one thinks and feels about them is not deception (or attempted deception⁶):

“The first and most obvious thing to note about many of the most important forms of reticence is that they are not dishonest, because the conventions that govern them are generally known. If I don’t tell you everything I think and feel about you, that is not a case of deception, since you don’t expect me to do so and would probably be appalled if I did.”⁷

Nagel is correct that (simply) intentionally not telling others everything that one thinks and feels about them is not attempted *deception*. That is, doing (simply) this, without the intention that they have a false belief, is not attempting to deceive. It is also true that, at least in normal conversations, (simply) intentionally not telling others everything that one thinks and feels about them is not *attempting to keep a secret*, either. Whether the reserve that exercised in normal conversations be called “reticence”, or simply reserve, it is not attempting to keep a secret. Attempting to keep a secret goes beyond reserve.

In distinguishing between lying⁸ and keeping a secret, Bok says the following: “Lying and secrecy differ, however, in one important respect. Whereas I take lying to be *prima facie* wrong, with a negative presumption against it from the outset, secrecy need not be. Whereas every lie stands in need of justification, all secrets do not.”⁹ In distinguishing between lying and keeping a secret on moral grounds, Bok necessarily implies that keeping a secret is not (or at least, is not necessarily) lying. Indeed, she necessarily implies that keeping a secret is not (or at least, is not necessarily) attempting to deceive either, since, according to Bok, to lie is to attempt to deceive.¹⁰ This implication is necessary because if two things differ on moral grounds, it follows that they cannot be identical, since moral differences supervene on non-moral differences.¹¹

The implication of Bok’s distinction is correct. Keeping a secret is not (or at least, is not necessarily) lying, and it is not attempting to deceive, either. However, this does not entail that lying and keeping a secret are to be distinguished on moral

grounds. Arson is not (or at least, is not necessarily) robbery; however, it may well be that they are not to be distinguished on moral grounds, and that they are morally equivalent.

Bok holds that lying is *prima facie* morally wrong, and hence, that every act of lying stands in need of a justification. While certain lies, e.g., those told by innocent people in order to protect themselves from being murdered, can be justified, most cannot be justified. According to Bok, therefore, most lies are morally wrong, and a tiny few are morally permissible (although, it seems, no lie is morally obligatory).¹²

Bok’s position on the morality of keeping secrets, however, is more difficult to determine. According to her, keeping a secret “need not be” either (a) wrong, or (b) *prima facie* wrong, and it is not the case that “all secrets” stand in need of justification.

One interpretation of what Bok is saying here is that keeping a secret is *prima facie* not wrong. That is, keeping a secret is *prima facie* morally permissible. That is, it is not the case that every act of keeping a secret stands in need of a justification. While *some* acts of keeping a secret stand in need of a justification, most do not. Of those acts of keeping a secret that stand in need of a justification, if there is no justification forthcoming, then they are morally wrong. However, if there is a justification forthcoming for those acts of keeping a secret, and if the justification is sufficient, then they are morally permissible. Meanwhile, all those acts of keeping a secret that do not stand in need of a justification are morally permissible.

If this is Bok’s position on secrets, then I believe it should be rejected. Her position on keeping secrets would be that the act of keeping a secret is morally neutral unless there is some special circumstance that renders it morally wrong. I do not accept, however, that keeping a secret is morally neutral unless there is some special circumstance that renders it morally wrong. This would making the act of keeping a secret the same, in principle, as the act of, for example, brushing my hair—which, I take it, is morally neutral unless there is some special circumstance that renders it morally wrong.

Instead, I contend that keeping a secret, and more generally, attempting to keep a secret, is *prima facie* morally wrong. Hence, every act of attempting to keep a secret stands in need of justification. However, justification is forthcoming for many, many attempts to keep a secret. In order to defend this position, I will turn to Kant.

KANT ON KEEPING A SECRET

According to Kant,¹³ there is a difference between keeping a secret and attempting to keep a secret, and deceiving and attempt-

ing to deceive (including lying). It is possible for a person to attempt to keep a secret from another person without attempting to deceive that other person.

To tell a lie, according to Kant, is to make a statement that one believes to be false, with the intention that that statement be believed to be true: "communication of one's thoughts to someone through words that yet (intentionally) contain the contrary of what the speaker thinks" (*MM*, 6: 429 (p. 552)). Importantly, according to Kant, an intention to deceive is required for lying.¹⁴ Hence, for Kant, all lying is attempted deception.

In his letter to Maria von Herbert in 1792, Kant distinguishes between the "honest but reticent" person and the liar. It is unclear from what he says here if the "honest but reticent" person is merely being reserved, as happens in normal conversations, or if the "honest but reticent" person is attempting to keep a secret. Either way, according to Kant, the "honest but reticent" person is not attempting to deceive. The "honest but reticent" person does not give "the whole truth." However, he does not make statements that he believes to be false, and hence, he is truthful: "What the honest but reticent man says is true but not the whole truth. What the dishonest man says is, in contrast, something he knows to be false. Such an assertion is called a lie, in the doctrine of virtue" (*C*, 11, 332 [412]). Saying that someone is truthful, however, does not capture adequately what it means to be "honest but reticent" and not attempting to deceive. This is because it is possible to be truthful and to attempt to deceive. In order to capture adequately what is involved in being "honest but reticent," it is necessary to distinguish between both being reserved and attempting to keep a secret, on the one hand, and attempting to deceive in any way whatsoever, including lying, on the other. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, after stating that "the mere fact that any prudent man finds it necessary to conceal a good part of his thoughts makes it clear enough that every member of our race is well advised to be on his guard and not to reveal himself completely" (*A*, 7: 332 [192]), Kant further distinguishes between three different things: dissimulation, which may involve *no* attempt to deceive; deception, which may involve *no* lying; and finally, lying: "So it already belongs to the basic composition of a human creature and to the concept of his species to explore the thoughts of others but to withhold one's own—a nice quality that does not fail to progress gradually from *dissimulation* to *deception* and finally to *lying*" (*A*, 7: 153 [32]).

The point of further distinguishing between dissimulation, deception, and lying, is that dissimulation is not (or is not necessar-

ily) deception or attempted deception. Although it appears that by 'dissimulation' Kant means attempting to keep a secret, as opposed to being reserved—since he talks about *progressing* from withholding one's own thoughts to dissimulation—both being reserved and dissimulation are to be distinguished from deception and attempted deception.

In the *Doctrine of virtue*, Part II of *The metaphysics of morals*, in 1797, in the course of his discussion of 'Moral friendship' (*MM*, 6: 471 [586]) Kant describes the relationship between people (outside of a moral friendship—see below) as that of a distrustful standoff, similar to that of people in a Hobbesian state of nature. Outside of a moral friendship people are reserved with each other, and do not tell others about their private thoughts and feelings, for fear that others will not reciprocate, and will use this information to take advantage of them. In particular, people attempt to keep their own faults *secret*, for fear that if others find out their faults they will no longer respect them:

He would like to discuss with someone what he thinks about his associates, the government, religion and so forth, but he cannot risk it: partly because the other person, while prudently keeping back his own judgments, might use this to harm him, and partly because, as regards disclosing his faults, the other person may conceal his own, so that he would lose something of the other person's respect by presenting himself quite candidly to him. [...] Every human being has his secrets and dare not confide blindly in others, partly because of a base cast of mind in most human beings to use them to one's advantage and partly because many people are indiscreet or incapable of judging and distinguishing what may or may not be repeated. (*MM*, 6: 471-2 [586-7])

Only when a person "finds someone intelligent—someone who, moreover, shares his general outlook on things," is he free of this anxiety such that he "can reveal himself with complete confidence" (*MM*, 6: 472 [587]). This is moral friendship.

It is clear that Kant is talking about more than merely being reserved here, and has in mind attempting to keep secrets from others. However, it may be argued that when one is conversing with people who are not one's 'moral friends,' it is not at all clear that it is required that one share one's faults with them. In any case, Kant goes further than saying that it is prudent to keep (some) secrets. He says that it is providential that we keep secrets about our believed-faults from others, since if people were not

secretive about their sins and weaknesses, then others would eventually grow accustomed to vice. The result would be that vice would become accepted. By succeeding in hiding iniquitous thoughts and feelings, this is avoided. That is, since people are bad, it is better that they keep their vices secret from others:

In just the same way, we conceal our faults, and try to give a different impression, and make a show of politeness, despite our mistrust; yet by this we grow used to politeness, and at length it becomes natural to us, and we thereby set a good example, at least to the eye; if this were not so, everybody would neglect these things, finding nobody the better for them. So by this endeavor to look well we actually end up doing so, later on. If men were all good, they could afford to be open-hearted; but not at present. (*LE*, 27: 445 [201])

From passages such as these it can be gathered that Kant holds that keeping (at least some) secrets is morally permissible, and, indeed, that it can be prudent to keep (at least certain) secrets, and indeed, that it can be morally meritorious to keep (at least certain) secrets—specifically, secrets about one's sins and vices.

However, Kant's defense of keeping one's sins and vices secret is open to at least one objection. His argument justifies keeping one's sins and weaknesses secret based on its good consequences, namely, self-protection and the prevention of the spread of vice. Such a consequentialist justification of keeping secrets is irrelevant, however, if keeping any secret whatsoever is prohibited by the Categorical Imperative. It must be determined, therefore, if keeping any secret whatsoever—or rather, attempting to keep any secret whatsoever—does not violate the Categorical Imperative.

VICTORIA'S SECRET

Consider the Universal Law Formula of the Categorical Imperative: "*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*" (*G*, 4: 421 [73]). If any maxim of attempting to keep a secret from others cannot be acted on if it is also a universal law—if the maxim's end would be frustrated if the maxim were also a universal law—then there is a perfect duty not to attempt to keep any secrets from others (which would entail a perfect duty not to keep any secrets from others). A maxim of attempting to keep a secret will therefore be considered.

Say that Victoria knows that she is an adopted child, but that she wants to keep it a secret that she is an adopted child. She formulates the following maxim: 'In order that others not know that I am adopted, I will not inform others that I am adopted.' If her maxim is made into a universal law, it becomes: Let every person who is adopted not inform others that she/he is adopted, in order that others not know that she/he is adopted. Would it be possible for Victoria to act on her maxim, and realize her end of others not knowing that she is adopted, if this were a universal law? It would be possible. If this were a universal law, it would be possible for Victoria to act on her maxim and realize her end.

Of course, if this were a universal law, then she herself would not know if anyone else was adopted (except by accident), because by this universal law no one else would inform her that she/he is adopted. However, her end is not that others not know that she is adopted and that she know that others are adopted. Her end is not this double standard. Her end is simply that others not know that she is adopted, and she is perfectly willing to forgo knowing if anyone else is adopted.

Since there is a maxim of attempting to keep a secret from others that can be acted on if it is also a universal law, the Formula of Universal Law of the Categorical Imperative does not generate a perfect duty to others not to keep secrets.

Consider the Humanity as an End in Itself Formula of the Categorical Imperative: "*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.*" (*G*, 4: 429 (80)) If it is not possible for another person to "agree to my way of behaving toward him, and so himself contain the end of this action" (*G*, 4: 430 (80)), then there is a perfect duty not to behave in this way. If it is not possible for a person to consent to another person attempting to keep a secret from her, then there is a perfect duty not to attempt to keep a secret from others.

It is not possible for a person to consent to another person attempting to keep a secret from her if the secret is revealed. For example, Heidi cannot consent to Victoria attempting to keep secret from her the fact that Victoria is adopted, since to do so Heidi would have to know that Victoria is adopted: 'Heidi, do you consent to me attempting to keep secret from you that I am adopted?'; 'Yes, Victoria, I consent to you attempting to keep secret from me that your are adopted.'

However, it is possible for a person to consent to another person attempting to keep a secret from her if the secret is not re-

vealed. It is necessary, of course, the secret not be revealed. For example, Heidi can consent to Victoria attempting to keep secret from her certain details about her childhood, since to do so Heidi would not have to know those details: 'Heidi, do you consent to me attempting to keep secret from you certain details about my childhood?'; 'Yes, Victoria, I consent to you attempting to keep secret from me certain details about your childhood.'

Since it is possible for a person to consent to another person attempting to keep a secret from her, the Formula of Humanity of the Categorical Imperative does not generate a perfect duty not to keep secrets.¹⁵

All that these arguments show, however, is that there is not a perfect duty not to attempt to keep secrets. That is, they show that it is not always morally wrong to attempt to keep a secret. They do not show that there is not an imperfect duty to others not to attempt to keep secrets. That is, they do not show that it is always morally permissible to attempt to keep a secret.

Consider again the Universal Law Formula of the Categorical Imperative. If a maxim of attempting to keep a secret from others cannot be rationally willed as a universal law—because it would frustrate the pursuit of other morally permissible and obligatory ends—then there is an imperfect duty not to attempt to keep secrets.

Say that Victoria believes that if everyone keeps everything that she/he knows a secret from others, then everyone, and in particular Victoria, can have an easy life. She formulates the following maxim of attempted complete secrecy: 'In order to have an easy life, I will inform no one of what I know.' If her maxim is made into a universal law, it becomes: Let no one inform anyone else of what she/he knows, in order to have an easy life. Although it is possible for Victoria to act on her maxim, and realize her end of having an easy life, if this is a universal law, she cannot rationally will such a universal law, since many situations could arise in which she would need information from others in order to pursue her various ethically permissible and obligatory ends. Such a universal law of complete secrecy would deprive her of this necessary information, and hence frustrate her pursuit of her various ethically permissible and obligatory ends.

The reason why complete secrecy is ethically impermissible is that it deprives one of information that one needs in order to pursue one's various ethically permissible and obligatory ends, since no one is omniscient. One must not, therefore, attempt to keep everything secret. It is not always morally permissible to

attempt to keep a secret. There is an imperfect duty to avoid attempting to keep secrets.

This argument supports the position outlined above, namely, that keeping a secret, and more generally attempting to keep a secret, is *prima facie* morally wrong. Hence, every act of attempting to keep a secret stands in need of justification. However, justification is forthcoming for many, many attempts to keep a secret.¹⁶

NOTES

¹Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1983), 5-6.

²In these and other passages, 'believe' will be taken to imply 'believe (or know)', where appropriate.

³Anette Baier, 'Why honesty is a hard virtue', in Owen Flanagan and Amélie Oxenberger Rorty, eds., *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 266. See also Mark Kingwell, "Is It Rational To Be Polite?", *Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993), 387-404.

⁴Paul Grice, *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1991), 26f.

⁵Unless otherwise indicated, for the remainder of the article, claims about D1 will be understood to apply to D2, *mutatis mutandis*.

⁶'Deceive' is a success verb. See my 'A Definition of Deceiving,' *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 21, p. 181-194.

⁷Thomas Nagel, "Concealment and Exposure," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27 (1998), p. 6.

⁸Bok does not here make a distinction between deceiving that does not involve lying, and keeping a secret. It is unclear if Bok holds that all deceiving that does not involve lying is *prima facie* morally wrong, as well as all lying.

⁹Bok, p. xv.

¹⁰See my "Two Definition of Lying", *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* (forthcoming).

¹¹See Simon Blackburn, "Moral Realism", in *Morality and Moral Realism*, ed. John Casey (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 101-124.

¹²Bok's arguments for this position are flawed, however. See my "Sissela Bok and Permissible Lying" (unpublished manuscript).

¹³References to Kant's works in the text and endnotes are given parenthetically, according to the abbreviations listed below. Pagination is as follows: first to the volume and page number in the standard edition of Kant's works, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, subsequently Deutsche, now Berlin-Brandenburg Akademie der Wissenschaften (originally under the editorship of Wilhelm Dilthey) (Berlin: Georg Reimer, subsequently Walter de Gruyter, 1900 -); second to the page number in the respective translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all emphases are in the original.

A: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht)* (1798), translated by Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

C: *Correspondence (Kant's Briefwechsel)*, translated and edited by Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

G: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten)* (1785), translated by Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37-108.

LE: *Lectures on ethics (Vorlesungen über Ethik)* (1924) translated by Peter Heath and edited by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

MM: *The metaphysics of morals (Die Metaphysik der Sitten)* (1797), translated by Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, 353-603.

¹⁴For more on Kant on lying, see my "The Truth about Kant on Lies" in *The Philosophy of Deception*, ed. Clancy Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press) (forthcoming). It should be noted, however, that there is such a thing as truthful deception. See my 'Kant on Lies, Candour and Reticence', *Kantian Review* 7 (2003), 102-133, especially 119f.

¹⁵The same result is obtained if the other formulae of the Categorical Imperative are used.

¹⁶Thanks to Chloë Taylor for suggesting that I write this article, and to Tracey Nicholls for her subsequent encouragement.