



# The Advanced College Essay:

Business and Its Publics

Edited by  
Denice Martone  
Pat C. Hoy II

Expository Writing Program  
New York University

# **The Advanced College Essay:**

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"Secrecy and Moral Choice," Bok, Sissela. *From Secrets : On the ethics of concealment and revelation*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982. Chapter 11.

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[http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/projects/digitexts/machiavelli/the\\_prince/title.html](http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/projects/digitexts/machiavelli/the_prince/title.html)

XIV That Which Concerns A Prince On The Subject Of The Art Of War, XV Concerning Things For Which Men And Especially Princes Are Praised Or Blamed, XVI Concerning Liberality And Meanness, XVII Cruelty And Clemency Whether It Is Better To Be Loved Than Feared, XVIII Concerning The Way In Which Princes Should Keep Faith, XIX That One Should Avoid Being Despised And Hated

"The Tao-te Ching," By Lao-tzu. Translated by James Legge. <http://classics.mit.edu/Lao/taote.html> Recommended Selections: 3, 17, 18, 19, 26, 29, 30, 31, 37, 38, 46, 53, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 67, 75, 8

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# **BUSINESS AND ITS SECRETS**

## **Progression One: Reckoning Generating Texts**



## ***Secrecy and Moral Choice***

*"Tell me your secrets."*

*I say not a word, for this is under my control.*

*"But I will fetter you."*

*What is that you say, man? Fetter me?*

*My legs you will fetter, but my deliberate  
choice not even Zeus has the power to overcome.*

EPICETUS, *Discourses*

### ***A Thought-Experiment***

Imagine four different societies: two of them familiar from religious and mythological thinking, the other two closer to science fiction. To the extent that each reflects aspects of our own world, it will arouse the ambivalence and unease characteristic of conflicts over secrecy.

—In the first of the four imaginary societies, you and I cannot keep anything secret; but others, or at least someone, perhaps a deity, can. We are transparent to them, either because we are incapable of concealment or because they have means of penetrating all our defenses.

- In the second society, all is reversed. You and I can pierce all secrets. A magic ring and a coat of invisibility give us access to these secrets, unbeknownst to those on whom we focus our attention.
- In the third society, no one can keep secrets from anyone who desires to know them. Plans, actions, fears, and hopes are all transparent. Surprise and concealment are out of the question.
- In the fourth society, finally, everyone can keep secrets impenetrable at will. All can conceal innocuous as well as lethal plans, the noblest as well as the most shameful acts, and hatreds and conspiracies as much as generosity and self-sacrifice. Faces reveal nothing out of turn; secret codes remain unbroken.

Abstract, for now, from possible supernatural influences that might render these societies either more or less benign, and consider how it would be to live in each one. Would these societies not all turn out to be less desirable than our own, with all its conflicts over secrecy and openness, all its unpredictability and imperfection? Despite its inadequate protection of personal liberties, its difficulties in preserving either the secrecy or the openness on which human beings thrive, and its many abuses, our own world nevertheless differs from each of the four above in ways for which we must be grateful.

It is precisely those elements of our own experience which bring us closest to one or another of the four that are most troubling. Thus the first society—in which you and I can keep no secrets—might appeal to saints who seek to live with few shelters, few secrets, and to the publicity-hungry who want the spotlight for theirs. But life for most of us would be too exposed, too vulnerable, without a measure of secrecy. We might wish for the transparency of this imagined world at chosen moments, with close friends; but we are also aware of its resemblance to the experience of persons subjected to the modern methods of interrogation, surveillance, and thought-control now employed in so many countries. Even Epictetus, quoted at the beginning of this chapter as saying that his secrets are under his control—that his feet might be fettered but never his deliberate choice—would have to use all his strength to resist these techniques, and still could not count on being able to hold out.

The second world, in which you and I can penetrate all secrets, echoes the perennial desire to satisfy all one's curiosity by moving unseen among others while learning their most closely held secrets. Yet as we reflect on the power that would be ours in this second world, we might hesitate to accept it. We would have to recognize not only its intrusiveness

but its dangers to us, the unseen intruders and manipulators. The experience of this imagined society is brought closer for those who employ the new techniques of surveillance and of surreptitious probing—the one-way mirrors, the electronic eavesdropping, the elaborate undercover investigations. That even many who avail themselves of such techniques are uneasy about them is clear from the debates over their use among social scientists or reporters or police agents.

Some might argue that these new techniques of probing, along with refined versions of very old ones, are becoming so common that we are approaching, rather, the third imaginary society, in which no one can keep secrets from anyone intent on knowing them. Thus one intelligence analyst has recently claimed that there "is no privacy from a well-financed, technically adept person or agency determined to gain personal information about an individual, group, or country."<sup>1</sup> One may wish to dispute his estimate, or argue that the expense of the efforts he has in mind is so great that most people would be safe from such intense probing. But what would the world be like if methods making secrecy impossible were generally available?

Might there be benefits in such universal transparency, as long as all could avail themselves of it? It would not only rule out secrecy but the very possibility of deceit and hypocrisy. Would such a state of openness among human beings not be nobler than the concealment we live with, and all the dissimulation it makes possible? Openness and sincerity, after all, are qualities we prize. As Meister Eckhart said, we call him a good man who reveals himself to others and, in so doing, is of use to them.<sup>2</sup>

On reflection, even those most in favor of openness among human beings might nevertheless reject the loss of all secrecy; or else advocate it only for certain exceptional persons who choose it for themselves and are able to tolerate it. Advocates of *universal* transparency have usually envisioned it for some future society free of the conflicts and contradictions of our own. Thus Sartre held that "transparency must substitute itself at all times for secrecy," but that this will be possible only when material want has been suppressed. At such a time, he argued, the relationship between men will no longer be antagonistic:

I can imagine rather easily the day when two men will have no more secrets from one another because they will keep secrets from no one, since the subjective life, just as much as the objective life, will be totally offered, given.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the desire for such mutual transparency, even when relegated to a future, idealized world, should give pause. We must consider the

drawbacks of too much information as well as those of being kept in the dark. And we must take into account our responses to all that we might learn about one another in such a world. Would we be able to cope with not only the quantity but also the impact upon us of the information thus within reach? And if secrecy were no longer possible, would brute force turn out to be the only means of self-defense and of gaining the upper hand? It is not inconceivable that the end result of a shift to the third imagined society would be chaos.

Aspects of the fourth society, finally, might develop precisely in response to the felt threat from increased transparency. They are foreshadowed in the governmental and commercial use of the "unbreakable codes" that cryptographers are currently designing, and in mechanisms to foil electronic eavesdropping. If such methods became available to everyone, and were capable of protecting all that people might wish to hide, how would our lives change? It is not certain that society as we now know it could survive such changes, for it depends in part on the possibility of predicting and forestalling or preparing for danger. Given a state in which no one could penetrate the secrets of others, nor know what harm they threatened, would those with the most far-reaching plans for aggression or crime win out? Or would so many fear such plans, and try to forestall them with violence of their own, that all would end in one great pre-emptive conflagration?

We contemplate these four imaginary societies with uneasiness. As I turn, in later chapters, to such practices as confession, psychotherapy, gossip, trade secrecy, cryptography, and undercover policing, I hope to show that our ambivalence toward them partakes of the same uneasiness. Is this response justified? If so, for what reasons? And what distinctions may we then wish to draw between forms of keeping, probing, and revealing secrets?

### *The Need for Secrecy*

Secrecy is as indispensable to human beings as fire, and as greatly feared. Both enhance and protect life, yet both can stifle, lay waste, spread out of all control. Both may be used to guard intimacy or to invade it, to nurture or to consume. And each can be turned against itself; barriers of secrecy are set up to guard against secret plots and surreptitious prying, just as fire is used to fight fire.

We must keep in mind this conflicted, ambivalent experience of secrecy as we study it in its many guises, and seek standards for dealing

with it. But because secrecy is so often negatively defined and viewed as primarily immature, guilty, conspiratorial, or downright pathological, I shall first discuss the need for the protection it affords.

Consider how, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Winston Smith tried to preserve one last expression of independence from the Thought-police. He had decided to begin a diary, even though he knew he thereby risked death or at least twenty-five years in a forced-labor camp. He placed himself in an alcove in his living room where the telescreen could not see him, and began to write. When he found himself writing DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER over and over, he panicked and was tempted to give up.

He did not do so, however, because he knew that it was useless. Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. Whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought-police would get him just the same. He had committed—would still have committed, even if he had not set pen to paper—the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it. Thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed forever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get to you.<sup>4</sup>

Subjected to near-complete surveillance, Winston Smith was willing to risk death rather than to forgo the chance to set down his thoughts in secret. To the extent that he retained some secrecy for his views, he had a chance to elude the Thought-police. Though aware that "sooner or later they were bound to get to you," he did not know that he was under surreptitious observation even as he prepared to write—that his most secret undertaking was itself secretly spied upon.

Conflicts over secrecy—between state and citizen, as in this case, or parent and child, or in journalism or business or law—are conflicts over power: the power that comes through controlling the flow of information.<sup>5</sup> To be able to hold back some information about oneself or to channel it and thus influence how one is seen by others gives power; so does the capacity to penetrate similar defenses and strategies when used by others. True, power requires not only knowledge but the capacity to put knowledge to use; but without the knowledge, there is no chance to exercise power. To have no capacity for secrecy is to be out of control over how others see one; it leaves one open to coercion. To have no insight into what others conceal is to lack power as well. Those who are unable or unwilling ever to look beneath the surface, to question motives, to doubt what is spoken, are condemned to live their lives in

ignorance, just as those who are unable to keep secrets of their own must live their defenseless.

\*Control over secrecy provides a safety valve for individuals in the midst of communal life—some influence over transactions between the world of personal experience and the world shared with others. With no control over such exchanges, human beings would be unable to exercise choice about their lives. To restrain some secrets and to allow others freer play; to keep some hidden and to let others be known; to offer knowledge to some but not to all comers; to give and receive confidences and to guess at far more: these efforts at control permeate all human contact.

Those who lose all control over these relations cannot flourish in either the personal or the shared world, nor retain their sanity. If experience in the shared world becomes too overwhelming, the sense of identity suffers. Psychosis has been described as the breaking down of the delineation between the self and the outside world: the person going mad "flows out onto the world as through a broken dam."<sup>6</sup> Conversely, experience limited to the inside world stunts the individual: at best it may lead to the aching self-exploration evoked by Nietzsche: "I am solitude become man.—That no word ever reached me forced me to reach myself."<sup>7</sup>

In seeking some control over secrecy and openness, and the power it makes possible, human beings attempt to guard and to promote not only their autonomy but ultimately their sanity and survival itself. The claims in defense of this control, however, are not always articulated. Some take them to be so self-evident as to need no articulation; others subsume them under more general arguments about liberty or privacy. But it is important for the purposes of considering the ethics of secrecy to set forth these claims. Otherwise it will not be possible to ask, in particular cases, to what extent they should apply and what restraints they might require. Nor will it be possible to study the extrapolations made from them in support of collective practices of secrecy.

The claims in defense of some control over secrecy and openness invoke four different, though in practice inseparable, elements of human autonomy: identity, plans, action, and property. They concern protection of what we are, what we intend, what we do, and what we own.

The first of these claims holds that some control over secrecy and openness is needed in order to protect identity: the sense of what we identify ourselves as, through, and with. Such control may be needed to guard solitude, privacy, intimacy, and friendship. It protects vulnerable beliefs or feelings, inwardness, and the sense of being set apart: of having or belonging to regions not fully penetrable to scrutiny, including

those of memory and dream; of being someone who is more, has become more, has more possibilities for the future than can ever meet the eyes of observers. Secrecy guards, therefore, not merely isolated secrets about the self but access to the underlying experience of secrecy.

Human beings can be subjected to every scrutiny, and reveal much about themselves; but they can never be entirely understood, simultaneously exposed from every perspective, completely transparent either to themselves or to other persons. They are not only unique but unfathomable.\* The experience of such uniqueness and depth underlies self-respect and what social theorists have called the sense of "the sacredness of the self."<sup>8</sup> This sense also draws on group, familial, and societal experience of intimacy and sacredness, and may attach to individual as well as to collective identity. The growing stress in the last centuries on human dignity and on rights such as the right to privacy echoes it in secular and individualized language.

Without perceiving some sacredness in human identity, individuals are out of touch with the depth they might feel in themselves and respond to in others. Given such a sense, however, certain intrusions are felt as violations—a few even as desecrations. It is in order to guard against such encroachments that we recoil from those who would tap our telephones, read our letters, bug our rooms: no matter how little we have to hide, no matter how benevolent their intentions, we take such intrusions to be demeaning.

Not only does control over secrecy and openness preserve central aspects of identity; it also guards their *changes*, their growth or decay, their progress or backsliding, their sharing and transformation of every kind.† Here as elsewhere, while secrecy can be destructive, some of it

\*Many have written about individuals as worlds, universes, or networks, unfathomable in practice if not in principle. And the death of an individual has been likened to the burning down of a great library or to a universe going extinct, as the inwardness and focus and connections of a life are lost, along with the sense of what William Blake called "the holiness of minute particulars."

†Identities and boundaries may themselves be transformed by the revelation or the penetration of certain secrets. And revealing, penetrating, and guarding secrets, in turn, often make use of transformations:

—Some ways of revealing secrets require a transformation, such as an initiation, on the part of those who are to share the secret. Their oath of secrecy, too, transforms their obligations. Their identity may undergo a metamorphosis of growth or destruction.

—Some secrets are transformed so as to be more easily guarded, through codes, miniaturation, or oracular sayings that only initiates will understand.

—Certain transformations allow the penetration of secrets. Becoming a "fly on the wall," or wearing the invisibility ring of myth or folk tale; all kinds of disguise; the bugging of rooms and electronic surveillance from afar: these changes allow probing of secrets otherwise carefully guarded.

is indispensable in human lives. Birth, sexual intimacy, death, mourning, experiences of conversion or of efforts to transcend the purely personal are often surrounded by special protections, and with rituals that combine secrecy and openness in set proportions.

Consider, for example, the role of secrecy, probing, and revelation with respect to pregnancy. In most cultures its workings have been thought mysterious, miraculous, at times terrifying. Like other experiences in which human boundaries are uncertain or shifting, pregnancy often increases vulnerability and the need for secrecy. Merely conjectured at first and pondered in secret by women, then perhaps revealed to a few, it is destined to unfold and to become known to many more. It is a period of heightened inwardness, awe, and joy for many women, giving them a sense of mattering in part because they have such a secret to keep or to reveal. At times these feelings are overwhelmed by fear and anxiety—concerning the future of the baby, perhaps, or of the pregnant mother herself once her condition becomes known.

A work that illuminates such conflicts over secrecy in pregnancy is *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, written in fourteenth-century Japan.<sup>9</sup> When still a child, Lady Nijo was forced to become the concubine of a retired emperor. She had several babies not fathered by him. Her book tells of the stratagems required each time to conceal her pregnant state, and to give birth in secret to a baby she could never hope to rear but had to turn over to others; it recounts her despair over this fate, her fear lest the emperor should learn she was the mother of a baby not his own, and her repeated attempts to escape her life at court to travel and write poetry as a Buddhist nun. Like Lady Nijo, women in many other cultures have had to conceal their condition, fearful that it be noticed, and afraid of the gossip, the loss of face if they were unmarried, perhaps the dismissal from work once concealment was no longer possible.\*

The second and third claims to control over secrecy presuppose the first. Given the need to guard identity, they invoke, in addition, the need for such control in order to protect certain plans and actions.

Choice is future-oriented, and never fully expressed in present action.

\*Even when a pregnancy is acknowledged, and after the expected baby is born, uncertainty and secrecy may persist regarding the identity of one or both of the parents. Strindberg, in *The Father*, has conveyed the anguish of a husband who suspects that he might not be the true father of his daughter. His brain "grinding at the empty thoughts until it burns out," he goes over and over in his mind all that he knows about reproduction, arguing that no man is ever fully certain of the paternity of his children. Women alone, he believes, are able to "know absolutely." "A man has no children—it is only women who bear children," he concludes, "and that is why the future may be theirs, when we die without offspring!"<sup>10</sup>

It requires what is most distinctive about human reasoning: intention—the capacity to envisage and to compare future possibilities, to make estimates, sometimes to take indirect routes to a goal or to wait. What is fragile, unpopular, perhaps threatened, such as Winston Smith's plan to express his views freely in his diary, seeks additional layers of secrecy. To the extent that it is possible to strip people of their capacity for secrecy about their intentions and their actions, their lives become more transparent and predictable; they can then the more easily be subjected to pressure and defeated.

Secrecy for plans is needed, not only to protect their formulation but also to develop them, perhaps to change them, at times to execute them, even to give them up. Imagine, for example, the pointlessness of the game of chess without secrecy on the part of the players. Secrecy guards projects that require creativity and prolonged work: the tentative and the fragile, unfinished tasks, probes and bargaining of all kinds. An elopement or a peace initiative may be foiled if prematurely suspected; a symphony, a scientific experiment, or an invention falters if exposed too soon. In speaking of creativity, Carlyle stressed the need for silence and secrecy, calling them "the element in which great things fashion themselves together."<sup>11</sup>

Joint undertakings as well as personal ones may require secrecy for the sharing and working out of certain plans and for cooperative action. Lack of secrecy would, for instance, thwart many negotiations, in which all plans cannot easily be revealed from the outset. Once projects are safely under way, however, large portions of secrecy are often given up voluntarily, or dispelled with a flourish. Surprises are sprung and jokes explained. The result of the jury trial can be announced, the statue unveiled, the secretly negotiated treaty submitted for ratification, the desire to marry proclaimed. Here again, what is at issue is not secrecy alone, but rather the control over secrecy and openness. Many projects need both gestation and emergence, both confinement and publicity. Still others, such as certain fantasies and daydreams and hopes, may be too ephemeral or intimate, at times too discreditable, ever to see the light of day.

Secrecy about plans and their execution, therefore, allows unpredictability and surprise. These are often feared; yet without them human existence would not only be unfree but also monotonous and stifling. Secrecy heightens the value of revelations; it is essential for arousing suspense, whether through stories told, surprises prepared, or waiting times imposed. It can lend the joy of concentration and solemnity to the smallest matters. Secrecy may also lower intensity and provide relief,

so that when a revelation is finally made—as after the death of those most intimately connected with events described in an author's private diaries—the anguish of exposure is lessened. In all these ways, secrecy is the carrier of texture and variety. Without it, and without the suspense and wit and unexpectedness it allows, communication would be oppressively dull—lifeless in its own right.

The fourth claim to control over secrecy concerns property. At its root, it is closely linked to identity, in that people take some secrets, such as hidden love letters, to *belong* to them more than to others, to be *proper* to them.<sup>12</sup> We link such secrets with our identity, and resist intrusions into them. But the claim to own secrets about oneself is often far-fetched. Thus the school-bus driver who has a severe heart condition cannot rightfully claim to *own* this medical information, even though it concerns him intimately. Even when outsiders have less need to share the information than in such a case, the question who owns a secret may be hard to answer. Should one include only those "about whom" it is a secret, those who claim a right to decide whether or not to disclose it, or all who know it?

In addition to such questions of owning secrets, secrecy is invoked to protect what one owns. We take for granted the legitimacy of hiding silver from burglars and personal documents from snoopers and busybodies. Here, too, the link to identity is close, as is that to plans and their execution. For had we no belongings whatsoever, our identity and our capacity to plan would themselves be threatened, and in turn survival itself. As H. L. A. Hart points out, life depends on the respect for at least "some minimal form of the institution of property (though not necessarily individual property) and the distinctive kind of rule which requires respect for it."<sup>13</sup> At the most basic level, if crops are to be grown, land must be secure from indiscriminate entry, and food must be safe from being taken by others.

The four claims to control over secrecy and openness to protect identity, plans, action, and property are not always persuasive. They may be stretched much too far, or abused in many ways. No matter how often these claims fail to convince, however, I shall assume that they do hold for certain fundamental human needs. Some capacity for keeping secrets and for choosing when to reveal them, and some access to the underlying experience of secrecy and depth, are indispensable for an enduring sense of identity, for the ability to plan and to act, and for essential belongings. With no control over secrecy and openness, human beings could not remain either sane or free.

## The Dangers of Secrecy

Against every claim to secrecy stands, however, the awareness of its dangers. It is the experience of these dangers that has led so many to view secrecy negatively, and that underlies statements such as that by Lord Acton, that "every thing secret degenerates."<sup>14</sup> Such categorical dismissals are too sweeping, but they do point to the harm that secrets can do both to those who keep them and to those from whom they are kept—harm that often thwarts and debilitates the very needs for which I have argued that control over secrecy is indispensable.

Secrecy can harm those who make use of it in several ways. It can debilitate judgment, first of all, whenever it shuts out criticism and feedback, leading people to become mired down in stereotyped, unexamined, often erroneous beliefs and ways of thinking. Neither their perception of a problem nor their reasoning about it then receives the benefit of challenge and exposure. Scientists working under conditions of intense secrecy have testified to its stifling effect on their judgment and creativity. And those who have written about their undercover work as journalists, police agents, and spies, or about living incognito for political reasons, have described similar effects of prolonged concealment on their capacity to plan and to choose, at times on their sense of identity.

Secrecy can affect character and moral choice in similar ways. It allows people to maintain façades that conceal traits such as callousness or vindictiveness—traits which can, in the absence of criticism or challenge from without, prove debilitating. And guilty or deeply embarrassing secrets can corrode from within before outsiders have a chance to respond or to be of help. This deterioration from within is the danger Acton referred to in his statement, and is at the root of the common view that secrecy, like other exercises of power, can corrupt.

These risks of secrecy multiply because of its tendency to spread. Aware of the importance of exercising control over secrecy and openness, people seek more control whenever they can, and rarely give up portions of it voluntarily. In imitation and in self-protection, others then seek more as well. The control shifts in the direction of secrecy whenever there is negligence or abuse to cover up; as a result, as Weber pointed out, bureaucracies and other organizations surround themselves with ever greater secrecy to the extent that circumstances permit.

As secrecy debilitates character and judgment, it can also lower resistance to the irrational and the pathological. It then poses great difficulties for individuals whose controls go awry. We know all the stifling rigidity that hampers those who become obsessed with secrecy. For them, secrecy

no longer serves sanity and free choice. It shuts off the safety valve between the inner and the shared worlds. We know, too, the pathologies of prying into the private spheres of others, and of losing all protection for one's own: voyeurism and the corresponding hunger for self-exposure that destroy the capacity to discriminate and to choose.

The danger of secrecy, however, obviously goes far beyond risks to those who *keep* secrets. If they alone were at risk, we would have fewer reasons to try to learn about, and sometimes interfere with, their secret practices. Our attitude changes radically as soon as we suspect that these practices also hurt others. And because secrecy can debilitate judgment and choice, spread, and become obsessive, it often affects others even when it is not intended to. This helps explain why, in the absence of clear criteria for when secrecy is and is not injurious, many people have chosen to regard all secrecy as potentially harmful.

When the freedom of choice that secrecy gives one person limits or destroys that of others, it affects not only his own claims to respect for identity, plans, action, and property, but theirs. The power of such secrecy can be immense. Because it bypasses inspection and eludes interference, secrecy is central to the planning of every form of injury to human beings. It cloaks the execution of these plans and wipes out all traces afterward. It enters into all prying and intrusion that cannot be carried out openly. While not all that is secret is meant to deceive—as jury deliberations, for instance, are not—all deceit does rely on keeping something secret. And while not all secrets are discreditable, all that is discreditable and all wrongdoing seek out secrecy (unless they can be carried out openly without interference, as when they are pursued by coercive means).

Such secrecy can hamper the exercise of rational choice at every step: by preventing people from adequately understanding a threatening situation, from seeing the relevant alternatives clearly, from assessing the consequences of each, and from arriving at preferences with respect to them. Those who have been hurt in such a way by the secrecy of others may in turn seek greater control over secrecy, and thus in turn experience its impairment of choice, its tendency to spread, its capacity to corrupt and to invite abuse.

### **Moral Considerations**

Given both the legitimacy of some control over secrecy and openness, and the dangers this control carries for all involved, there can be no

presumption either for or against secrecy in general. Secrecy differs in this respect from lying, promise-breaking, violence, and other practices for which the burden of proof rests on those who would defend them. Conversely, secrecy differs from truthfulness, friendship, and other practices carrying a favorable presumption.

The resulting challenge for ethical inquiry into the aims and methods of secrecy is great. Not only must we reject definitions of secrecy that invite approval or disapproval; we cannot even begin with a moral presumption in either direction. This is not to say, however, that there can be none for particular practices, nor that these practices are usually morally neutral. But it means that it is especially important to look at them separately, and to examine the moral arguments made for and against each one.

In studying these moral arguments, I shall rely on two presumptions that flow from the needs and dangers of secrecy that I have set forth. The first is one of *equality*. Whatever control over secrecy and openness we conclude is legitimate for some individuals should, in the absence of special considerations, be legitimate for all. If we look back at the four imaginary societies as illustrations, I can see no reason why some individuals should lack all such control, as in the first and second societies, and not others: no reason why, as in the first society, only you and I should be unable to keep anything secret or, as in the second, be able to penetrate all secrets. No just society would, if it had the choice, allocate controls so unequally. This is not to say that some people might not be granted limited powers for certain of those purposes under constraints that minimize the risks—in journalism, for instance, or government; but they would have to advance reasons sufficient to overcome the initial presumption favoring equality. On the basis of this presumption, I reject both the first and the second of the imaginary societies, and any others that come close to them even in part.

My second presumption is in favor of *partial individual control* over the degree of secrecy or openness about personal matters—those most indisputably in the private realm. (I shall leave for later consideration the question of large-scale collective control over secrecy and openness regarding personal matters, as well as individual or collective control over less personal matters, such as professional, business, or government secrets.) Without a premise supporting a measure of individual control over personal matters, it would be impossible to preserve the indispensable respect for identity, plans, action, and belongings that all of us need and should legitimately be able to claim.

Such individual control should extend, moreover, to what people