



SECRETS IN PARADISE AND PRICES

An Introduction

Are there secrets in Paradise? If secrets are something bad, they do not exist in Paradise. If they seem to exist, that place is not a paradise. Of course, the Bible says that the Christian Paradise had its secret, namely, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil whose fruit Adam and Eve were not supposed to eat. When they ate the sweet fruit, they came to know the hidden truth, but they also sinned. It is difficult to understand why they should not have known, or why all this knowledge should have been kept as a secret. But all this is God's own secret. Perhaps the place where Adam and Eve were living was not a real paradise; the reason being that it contained such a deadly secret. Real paradises are without secrets and all the problems they necessarily create. This fact entails that the value of secrets is negative.

However, the value of secrets is sometimes, or often, positive. Think of a case where a person has committed a serious crime which she wants to keep secret, for obvious reasons. In her situation she has two alternatives, namely, to hide the incriminating fact or to accept her punishment. For the person in question, the first alternative seems to be better than the second alternative. The secret has its positive value.

But can we say that sometimes a secret has social value or value to all the people? In the criminal example above, the individual values her secret, although society denies this value. From the social point of view, her secret is not desirable; on the contrary, it should be revealed so that the criminal can be punished. It seems that secrets designate conflict situations in the sense that when one person wants to keep a secret another one is interested in it and, therefore, wants to know it. A secret is not a secret if no one is interested in it.

Perhaps the situation is not that simple? We can imagine many cases in which we do not want to know a secret. Suppose my grandfather was a notorious cannibal, but I do not know this for a fact. I do not even want to come to know such an evil family secret. But even if I do not want to know

it, some other parties are positively interested in such a scandal – and this is exactly the reason why it is a secret. The fact that I do not want to know is, then, irrelevant. A secret entails a conflict of interest in the sense that some (may) want to know it, while others (may) want to conceal it. Then there are those who want to conceal it that they do not even know the secret. Contrary to this fact, if they came to know the secret, they would not like hearing it.

Secrets are mysterious and scandalous entities. They drive whole nations crazy. Think about the situation where some religious groups are said to steal and then murder babies during their secret rituals. Witch-hunts were based on such global rumors which caused anger and hatred in the minds of many people. Such secrets are also public secrets in the sense that they are secrets everybody knows. Therefore, secrets may as well be small-scale personal matters of shame. A man becomes bald and tries to keep it secret, as if somebody wants to know.

Secrets entail a conflict of interest, real or imagined, but we could not live without them. They are everywhere, even in Paradise. We cannot imagine a world without secrets - as pervasive as they are. Surveillance societies, where we now live, recognize this fact. We are under continuous surveillance because so many people have something to hide. (Is this so?) Yet, no one imagines that the best surveillance systems could make sense of all the secrets in this world. In fact, many of the surveillance systems are secret. So, in a near paradoxical manner, surveillance, both, reveals and creates secrets. This is how it is. We people need and want our secrets. They are an essential part of our personal identity and life in this world.

This volume deals with secrets from many different points of view: economical, game theoretical, social, ethical, and philosophical. Secrets *de dicto* are not secrets, because we are able to analyze them, to tell their story, and to evaluate them. We often feel deceptively familiar and comfortable with them. Secrets are secret only *de re* – and that is enough. Even if we would not like knowing too many secrets, we should know what the secrets are *de dicto*. This volume attempts to do just that; to give an interesting picture of at least some applications of secrets in different areas of life and learning. As such, secrets are an inexhaustible field; even the definition of the concept of secrets is shrouded in mystery. Think, for example, about public secrets, or secrets known by everybody. How are they possible? Then there are secrets which give us an advantage and secrets which fill us with fear. When you are going to be tortured by the CIA, is it good to have a secret to tell them or not? Would they believe that you told them just what they wanted to hear? Perhaps you can convince them that you have no secrets to tell them? Secrets create a social game

which we play all the time, some more successfully than others.

Adam Smith knew this, of course. In his “Wealth of Nations” we read:¹

Secrets in manufactures are capable of being longer kept than secrets in trade. A dyer who has found the means of producing a particular colour with materials which cost only half the price of those commonly made use of, may, with good management, enjoy the advantage of his discovery as long as he lives, and even leave it as a legacy to his posterity. His extraordinary gains arise from the high price which is paid for his private labour. They properly consist in the high wages of that labour. But as they are repeated upon every part of his stock, and as their whole amount bears, upon that account, a regular proportion to it, they are commonly considered as extraordinary profits of stock.

The point is simple and self-evident: secrets can be valuable. Of course, no one comes and tortures Adam Smith’s dyer in order to make him reveal his valuable secret. Of course, no one comes and tricks him into talking too much. This is the world of economics. However, the authors of this volume show that there is nothing intrinsically peaceful or self-evident in the world of secrets; on the contrary, secrets can be exploited and explored, but they cannot be exhausted. This fact need not be kept as a secret.

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¹ “The Wealth of Nations,” (Book I, Chap. VII, p.163) edited by Quentin Skinner (1974[1776]), Harmondsworth: Penguin.