

Public/Private

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The public/private dichotomy was as crucial to ancient as it is to modern thought and society. The fact that it disappeared during the feudal period in between gives us a clue as to its most basic meaning: the public/private distinction largely registers the separation of the 'household' from institutions which represent general or collective social interests. Under feudalism, all of what we might now call 'society' was understood in terms of kinship or kin-like bonds of loyalty or fealty on the model of the patriarchal household. The onset of both Western modernity and its public sphere is often identified with the separation of 'public' finances and institutions in the form of 'the state' from the 'private' coffers and household of the monarch.

For ancient Greek and Roman society, the public sphere – the *polis* or *res publica* – was the realm of free association between free citizens. It was in public that men (and only men) could be their true selves and achieve virtue and fame through competition in such things as sports and rhetoric. Men were deemed free in the *polis* not because it was unregulated but because it was kept rigidly separated from the private sphere of the household and domestic economy (*oikos*): the domestic sphere was regarded as the realm of mere physical reproduction and therefore of the compulsion and slavery of needs (particularly bodily), of immersion in the trivial, industrial and 'merely' private. The public sphere depended on the private sphere, and this was clearly recognized: to be a citizen one not only had to have wealth but actually to be the head of a household in which women, children and slaves attended to one's individual and particularistic needs, thus freeing one to move from the private world (the mundane, temporary,

needy, natural) to the public world (a realm of culture, achievement and the hope of enduring fame) (Habermas 1991). Obviously household members other than the head could not enter the public sphere because they were slaves to necessity and therefore could not attain that state of freedom which was a *precondition* of citizenship. However, although public life depended on the private, private life was felt to have no intrinsic value and existed *only* to support the 'good life' lived in public: a life spent in privacy was by definition 'idiotic' (Arendt 1958: 37).

Modernity has in some respects reversed these valuations: as we shall see below, the private world of the individual, family and intimacy is now commonly regarded as the primary source of authentic values. Yet in many respects, the modern distinction runs in parallel to the ancient. One major meaning of the private/public distinction for example is the opposition between economy (*oikos*) and politics (*polis*) (as in privatization versus public ownership). The political should, by its very nature, constitute a sphere of general interest through sociable discourse and consultation as well as by virtue of an institutional distance from the ignoble (and self-interested) pursuit of private gain. Conversely, the economy is particular, individual and bound up with survival rather than goodness or virtue. Quite literally, 'privatization' means to return enterprise from the general interest of the political sphere to the private interests represented in economic action.

However, modernity has complicated the public/private divide in other ways. Above all, ancient thought and life ascribed *all* economic endeavour to the private household where it was carried out by women and subordinate (or enslaved) men. Modernity, on the other hand, divides economic activity itself between a public and private realm: we distinguish between the public world of work, production and enterprise on the one hand, and the private world of domestic life and reproduction on the other. Moreover, the public/private and production/reproduction divisions are conventionally understood in terms of a gender division of labour: in the conventional view, paid work outside the home is part of men's participation in public life as well as essential to their public status as 'bread-winners' for the private household of dependants; these dependants then belong to an unpaid and private world.

Hence, the modern public/private distinction is not one but (at least) two distinctions. Firstly, it refers to a very broad distinction between the general interest and that which pertains to particular interests. In this sense, the state is public (hence, an employee of the state is a 'public servant' rather than one who serves particular interests), whereas 'civil society' indicates that realm in which individuals come together on the basis of their private interests. Secondly, both the state and civil society, as well as the world of work, can be seen as a public sphere populated largely by men who are deemed able to operate outside the 'private' realm of the domestic household to which women and children are largely confined. In this

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distinction, the private also marks a realm of personal intimacy, of relationships which are to be defended from public scrutiny or interference, of values which cannot or should not be experienced in public life. These two sets of distinctions are interrelated and often confused in various ways. However, to begin with we will look at each one separately.

ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

In modern times, the public/private distinction arises originally, and most vividly, through early liberalism and utilitarianism. From Locke onwards, various concepts of privacy are used to restrict, resist and discipline the state (first the monarch, then modern political institutions). Liberalism's fundamental commitment is to liberty, which is conceived as the individual's right to pursue their privately defined desires. Modern liberalism starts, morally and philosophically, from the idea of sovereign individuals who are endowed with various needs (for example, for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness), who have knowledge of those needs and who possess *reason*. They are thus defined by their rational pursuit of 'self-interest', and this is taken as the central definition of the private domain. From Hobbes onwards it is argued that society (let alone mere government) only arises when these sovereign individuals come together for various self-interested reasons (such as avoiding the 'war of all against all' or defence against external threats). Public institutions, in this account, only arise to defend private individuals and these individuals may legitimately dissolve public institutions if they contravene private interests. Liberalism carries this ethical position right through into contemporary thought: public institutions are to be entirely accountable to (and theoretically reducible to) the voluntary associations of private individuals pursuing their particular, rather than general, interests. When Margaret Thatcher declared that 'There is no such thing as society; only individuals and their families', she was articulating the classical liberal notion that the private has analytical and political priority over a public sphere which can only emerge through the voluntary association of individuals. This attitude to collectivities and to the very idea of social relations is profoundly consequential for social thought. This is most clearly expressed in the division between 'methodological individualists' for whom social structures can have no real existence except as the (generally unintentional) outcomes of a multitude of individual actions, and those such as Durkheim for whom society involves a publicly binding moral order.

The liberal view of the relation between public and private is often articulated as a relation between the state and 'civil society'. As we have noted, civil society labels a peculiarly modern notion of privacy: not the household but the realm of voluntary associations in which people come

together in pursuit of their own political or economic interests. The most complete and complex version of this image of society is undoubtedly the market as portrayed in neo-classical economics. The market (as defined from the time of de Quesnay and Smith) is not a public institution at all or even a public sphere, properly speaking. It is simply what happens when a large number of individuals come together on the basis of private interests which they each rationally pursue through calculations of supply and demand, profit and utility reckoned in the common denominator of price. This multitude of calculations is indeed 'private' in that we need know nothing about what people want or why they want it: we (theorists and economic actors) merely watch people's behaviour (how much they are willing to buy and sell at various prices), observe the prices that result, and then orient our own actions accordingly. If this behaviour is allowed to carry on unimpeded, it will naturally produce 'welfare' (via Smith's 'hidden hand' of the market). However, if people's pursuit of their private desires is interfered with in the name of any public interest (for example, a belief that the state could manage things more efficiently, or a collective, publicly enforced notion of 'what people really need') then disaster will ensue in the form of both loss of liberty and economic inefficiency. Hence, a cornerstone of modern political ideology is the privacy of needs: for example, the concepts of consumer choice and consumer sovereignty express the view that my choices are private and unquestionable, that no one can legitimately tell me what I want or need or what I *should* want or need. For the ancients, the public sphere was to be defended from the private household on which it depended. Liberalism reverses this: the private is now the source of all ethical value and defines 'man's' liberty and true self. At the same time, the rise of this essentially bourgeois sphere (and concept) of civil society and private association has been continuously bound up with the creation of new forms of public sphere, and above all with ideas of 'public opinion', public information and communications, news and media. It is recognized from the eighteenth century onwards that private freedom as well as private commerce require an informed and involved citizenry, one that takes a public role and can enforce public accountability. For example, Tocqueville was concerned that when a people are entirely immersed in the pursuit of private interests they will leave public matters to professionals who, unchecked, can become tyrants. 'Publicity' – in the sense that some actions be carried out under the cold scrutiny of the collective citizenry – is crucial to democracy. And yet with another turn of the screw, modern thought has been obsessed with the freedom and independence of the organs of public opinion themselves: can commercial (i.e. privately owned) media, or media controlled by government (i.e. pursuing the particular interests of state institutions), truly inform or give voice to public opinion as opposed to manipulate and orchestrate it for private ends?

Private and public merge confusingly into one another in a further sense: privately owned productive forces can constitute huge social organizations

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with public functions and consequences. Unlike the household economy devalued by classical thought, modern production is carried out outside the home, within organizations and social relations (factories, division of labour, labour contracts and markets, capital and money as social relations) which are social rather than domestic or familial in character and are therefore 'public'. Marx clearly recognized the public status of private capital (and accords it a progressive role) in the sense that it constantly intensified the socialization of the labour process, collecting workers in ever greater numbers in ever larger units of production. Though still privately employed by private capital, the workforce could begin to see itself as a public body of interdependent social beings who could then take control through collective ownership in order to bring the forces of production clearly into the realm of the public and of politics. Some modern thinkers have emphasized the relative size and power of 'private' enterprise *vis-à-vis* the public domain: it is hard to apply the notion of 'private pursuit of individual interest' to a multinational corporation with a turnover dwarfing that of many states and employing hundreds of thousands within a complex technical division of labour. Similarly, the symptomatic modern fear of advertising and marketing technologies concerns the ability of private firms to invade and manipulate the private realm of the individual, and to mould private needs into appropriate forms of effective (public and collective) demand. As Leavis and Thompson (1933: 30–1) put it, 'A mass-production plant can be worked profitably only if it is worked to its full capacity, and only if its full output is absorbed by the market. That is to assume (output being so large in relation to population) something like the status and function of a public national organ.'

Progressive social theory and practice attacked the public/private division – which it associated with exploitation and alienation – arguing that private interests should be brought under the control of the public interest, that individual desires should form into a collective will, that the economy should be subsumed within the polity. It was thus relatively close to ancient thought which gave priority to an idealized *polis* over a devalued *oikos*. Hence, the familiar debates between 'privatization' and 'public ownership' in which private ownership mediated through markets is regarded as both anarchic and oppressive, whereas public ownership is identified with both democracy and reason because it brings both the means and the ends of economic life under public scrutiny and control. The dominant liberal-democratic version of this involved a measured compromise between public and private interest within a mixed economy: some needs are both private and best filled privately (highly particularistic consumer needs where choice is paramount); other needs are seen as universal and entailing an obligation on the part of society (in the form of the state) to its members, or are seen as essential to the continuance of society itself (hence, health, education and basic minima of food, clothing and shelter).

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On the other hand, conservative, anti-modern thinkers from Burke onwards have also wished to overturn the public/private distinction, but they have tended to advocate a return to an (idealized, even feudalist) premodernity in which the political and the economic are integrated within traditional agrarian life. At the extreme point, fascism seeks to fashion a single people, the national community as a single family or household under the patriarchal guidance of party or paternalist firm. In this conception, the idea of 'culture' is often advocated as a way of transcending both economy and politics, to bring private and public together again within an organic 'way of life' and values which are to unite public and private behaviour.

THE PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD AND THE INTIMATE WORLD

The private sphere of civil society came to be viewed as the ethical centre of the modern world, but not everyone could enter it. When Locke talked of 'man's' natural liberties it is fairly clear that the apparently universalistic meaning of the word 'man' as usual cloaked its exclusionary character: Locke actually meant males who were white, adult and property owning. Only such people were deemed sufficiently able to know their own interests and pursue them rationally so that they might enter the sphere of civil society as voters, as 'public opinion' (in the media, the coffee houses, the intelligentsia), as economic agents in their own right with power of disposal over money and property (as opposed to consumers spending money earned by the head of household). Hence, that sphere which was private for empowered men was a prohibited public world for women and subordinate males who were restricted – as in ancient days – to the household, to the *oikos* whose private labour subsidizes the public life of men.

From the outset of modern social thought, then, the identification of public and private with state and civil society already assumed a further, underlying distinction between the world of the household and that outside it. This distinction was profoundly bound up with a gender division of labour between production and reproduction, and the gradual separation of paid, 'productive' labour from the home. In the premodern world production and reproduction were largely undifferentiated and carried out as household production; exchange of goods was a marginal or superficial feature. Modern economic relations on the other hand sharply distinguish public from private labour. On the one hand, social value, status and power depend on work which is carried out in socially organized institutions, which is 'productive' (contributes to the production of socially recognized forms of value such as profit) and which is consequently paid. Reproductive labour within the home, on the other hand – the work of maintaining

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body and soul through such things as cooking, cleaning, sewing; socializing and educating children; keeping up the practices and rituals of the culture and community – is treated as private labour and is unpaid. This version of the public/private distinction is clearly bound up with a gender division of labour which is exacerbated over the modern period as women are increasingly excluded from the public sphere of paid work and associated with the unpaid labour of maintaining the private sphere. Women (and children) are restricted in belief and practice to the private world of the family which is subordinate to and ruled (through the male breadwinner) by the public sphere. This exclusion has very direct material consequences: being confined to the private sphere means having neither the power and independence nor the status and equality that go with having money or property. It also means exclusion from civil rights such as the right to own property or to vote which are granted to participants in the public sphere. Finally, the original public/private distinction between production and reproduction is developed, in the twentieth century, into a distinction between (public) work and (private) *consumption*. Perhaps the high point of this process is the 1950s image of the middle-class family in which the father goes out to do publicly valued work, bringing home a wage which is spent by the mother as an expert in consumption, shopping and even 'domestic science' (a subject taught at school).

However, the distinction between the private household and the public world is bound up with considerably more than a distinction between paid and unpaid work. Rather, it seems to organize a very wide range of social distinctions and dichotomies, to assign different terms and experiences to different social spaces. Hence, when we think of privacy as the domestic, intimate and familial world, we associate it with (for example) emotion rather than reason, affection rather than competition, nurture rather than manufacture, substantive values rather than instrumental reason, personal rather than monetary or material bonds. Public and private are seen as different realms of experience and value, spatially and temporally separated and epitomized by different sorts of people and roles. Moreover, because these different worlds were seen in terms of gender division (as well as the distinction between adult and child, and between the biologically 'natural' family unit as opposed to the voluntary associations of men in business or politics) they were also seen to exemplify the most fundamental of modern distinctions, that between the natural and the social, between nature and culture. The private realm of the family, as well as the intimate world of the romantic couple, were anchored on the 'naturalness' of women, above all in their reproductive functions of bearing children and caring for men; the public sphere reflected the man's 'natural' capacity for reason, production and self-consciousness. Ironically, the distinction of public from private based on the closeness of one gender to nature is not very far removed from ancient thought (not surprisingly given the powerful influence of classical revivals amongst the Enlightenment expounders of such ideas): in ancient

times, men could constitute the *polis* because they could both separate themselves from the necessities of physical life and at the same time dominate those who attended to them. Similarly, it is argued, in modernity women have been closely associated with nature and with domination by their bodily and emotional needs (their 'nature' as childbearing, nurturing, natural). They are therefore located in the private realm while masculinity is held to transcend the particularistic needs of the body and to be capable of a 'universalism' appropriate to the public sphere: it is able to 'separate itself and dominate nature' (Gatens 1991), to transcend the particularity of the body and enter into the (disembodied) universality of reason. Men can enter the public realm by virtue of being disembodied, while women are confined to the natural, to the bodily and hence the privacy of childbirth and childrearing.

The private sphere and its inhabitants can be treated as subordinate and inferior to the public, literally as 'dependants' who may serve but not accompany those who operate in the public world. Some of the most powerful modern movements (for example against sexism and racism) have taken the form of struggles for civil rights on the part of those who have been confined to the domestic world on the grounds that they have not the qualities required for public life: women and ethnic minorities campaigning for equality of wages and job opportunities, for the vote, for education, and so on. And yet, at the same time, the idealization and defence of the private sphere has been a central theme of modernity: Western culture has projected onto it an enormous range of values and experiences which seem to have been lost from public life yet to be essential to personal life. One starting point for this is the idealization of childhood from the eighteenth century onwards. As recounted by Aries (1973), premodern biographies did not include a separate stage of childhood, rather seeing the young as little adults whose activities and obligations were not radically differentiated from those of bigger adults. From the eighteenth century, childhood comes increasingly to be seen as both different and special, characterized by notions such as goodness and innocence, play, asexuality, love and affection. Especially in Rousseau, children – in common with noble savages – represent the natural values lost to artificial modern society. The private sphere is now meant to nurture and defend the child's innocence against the corruption of public life while the child comes to symbolize the innocence and beauty of the private sphere of the family itself. In Victorian society, this idealization comes to be central to a cult of the family, to the cloying sentimentality through which the 'pure' child (and pure woman) is to be utterly separated and defended from work, sexuality, knowledge, evil. Similarly, the increasing confinement of middle-class women within the private household is intricately bound up with idealizing them, 'placing woman on a pedestal', whereby she is excluded from public life because she is deemed irrational, incompetent and incapable of rising above 'nature' yet is also worshipped for exactly the same reasons.

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The bourgeois idealization of the private was bound up with the idea of home as 'haven' from the public world: especially during the Victorian era, it came to be seen as virtually a sacred place which was filled with all the emotion, security, solidarity, continuity, substantive values and moral cohesion that had been squeezed out of the public world of instrumental reason and utilitarianism, of insecurity and constant change, of competitive individualism and of formal calculation. Indeed for many Victorians, the public/private division was closer to a division between sacred and profane, religion and reason. The idea of home as haven extended to the realm of the 'intimate', affective bonds between individuals (usually a man and a woman, or mother and child) which could be neither constituted nor even properly understood by the public. Perhaps one of the most extreme moments in this development was the ideal of romantic love, a notion of privacy that contested even domesticity as too determined by public considerations: the idea that the central human relationship was an entirely private relation of 'love' between two people, isolated from all other social relations and public considerations was inconceivable to the premodern world. Before the modern separation of public from private the formation of familial bonds was a matter of calculation and social strategy. The idea that one's choice of partner, or one's affective bonds, and marriage should coincide and be equally matters of private and irrational choice was a modern notion. In fact, the idea that one's intimate affections could be held to no public account (they were irrational, 'subjective', private to the 'reasons' of the heart) and should transcend all public concerns (for example, should not involve consideration of public advantages or advancement) was central to romantic rebellions *against* bourgeois society.

The idealizations of private family life were defined in relation to the life of the emerging bourgeoisie and articulated through its public discourses (religion, education, social sciences, state policy) as well as private behaviour. Indeed, a central development of the nineteenth century was the emergence of the notion of 'respectability', which not only required appropriate public behaviour but also stressed the propriety of the publicly visible tips of the private iceberg: language and accent, dress, cleanliness, home décor, etiquette – all ensured a rigid separation of private and public life (above all, the complete privatization of sexuality) and provided signs that private life conformed (or aspired) to middle-class standards. The informal public norms of 'respectability', however, could also mutate into public policy and scientific discourses about how private life should be led. The private lives of social classes other than the bourgeoisie were viewed as either dangerously secretive or probably degenerate: in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many 'explanations' of modern social ills have focused on such failures to match the ideals of private life as maternal deprivation, fallen women, dysfunctional families, intemperance. While bourgeois private life was to be defended, the private lives of others could be the objects of social research and theory, as well as state policies. For example, the welfare state

could be seen as helping people maintain certain minimum requirements of private life (as well as gaining opportunities of work and citizenship in public life). It could also be argued that in the process of doing so it defined the requirements of private life by codifying the mores of middle-class private life into public norms. For example, in many aspects of social provision, welfare states still assume a nuclear family (heterosexual, focused on childrearing, married). Moreover, the welfare state had also to define rules as to when it could offend against the general modern premise that a man's home is his castle. Hence, there is much concern to define the point at which private life has sufficiently failed in relation to norms of family life that the state can or must take children into care, enforce public health regulations, step between husband and wife and so on.

The difference from the ancient view is instructive: for the Greeks, one could only be free and therefore authentic in the public world; the private merely secured freedom from necessity. One could only really be someone in public. Much the same view pertained to eighteenth-century society (at least as experienced through the Enlightenment and its revival of these classical themes): convivial public sociability (for example, the coffee-houses and inns) epitomized both the good life and authentic being. It is really only with Romanticism, inaugurated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau from the 1750s, that this view comes under attack: 'society' comes to be seen as an alien force or pressure, badgering people into conformism through the tyranny of fashion, etiquette, social scrutiny and so on. In contrast to the Greek (and neo-classical) view, society was now precisely the place where one could *not* be oneself. But in private one could: Rousseau quite revolutionized our view of the private by inventing it as the realm of the *intimate*, in which the truth of the self was to be discovered, experienced and treasured. Above all, truth was to be found in the self and in the intimate world which expressed and nurtured it, whereas in modern society, 'to be and to appear became two entirely different things, and from this distinction arose ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their train' (Rousseau 1984: 119). Rousseau's position involved an implicit injunction: the falsity of public life and the social world was to be judged by the authenticity of the intimate self, and there was a new ethical obligation to make one's public face conform to one's private self, to be *authentic*. Hence, the profound symbolism that Rousseau wrote the first autobiography: he aimed to write a truthful account of his intimate experience *in public*.

BLURRING THE DISTINCTION

Rousseau's romantic concern that public life should be governed by the values of the private self raises another set of issues. We have been

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concerned so far with the separation of public and private in the modern world. However, many social commentators have been more concerned with the confusion or blurring of the public/private division in both thought and practice. For example, Richard Sennett (1977) argues that Rousseau and Romanticism have promoted a situation in which the intimate values of the private world – above all the injunction to authenticity – have unwarrantedly invaded the public. Eighteenth-century members of the bourgeois public sphere were expected to perform through emulative consumption, adoption of fashionable manners, expressions and activities and so on. However, Sennett argues, such performances did not need to be 'authentic': it was not believed that this public behaviour expressed, or even should express, a true self; it was a performance, and a performance carried out 'at a distance from the self'. 'Seeming' and 'being' were separate issues and could live in comfortable discordance. Increasingly, however, a culture of authenticity has arisen in which we are expected to really be what we seem to be, and must appear (in public) as we really are (in private).

Sennett's argument stands in marked contrast to the more common argument that public values and institutions have invaded private life. For example, a variety of Marxist authors – probably best exemplified by the Frankfurt School or Lefebvre – have been concerned that 'private life' is becoming increasingly fictive or ideological with the expansion of both capitalism and the bureaucratic state. Whereas family life, leisure and consumption have been presented as sacred and as autonomous spheres of freedom, they have in fact become the objects (and vehicles) of modern forms of social control such as advertising and marketing, state policy, bureaucratic rationality. For example, Adorno argues that the ostensible privacy of leisure has become integrated as a functional part of capitalist reproduction, carrying out the public functions of increasing commodity consumption, enabling workers to recuperate their energies for further work, and ensuring political passivity through a policy of bread and circuses. Similarly, the private family can be understood in terms of its public function of reproducing labour. Hence, private life appears free yet has in fact been colonized by public commercial and political institutions.

Finally, a range of postmodern arguments stress the breakdown of the public/private distinction alongside most other spheres differentiated under modernity. The arguments for this are various and reprise many of the themes we have looked at. Firstly, public and private domains were partly established through the separation of work from the home and the distinction of production from reproduction. Yet these divisions are under attack. The former is threatened by new work structures involving short-term contracts, freelancing, home working and the mobility of work due to new technologies. The latter is threatened by a long-term move to service industries and to the management of people in work: more and more work and commodities provide goods which might once have belonged to the private sphere. For example, the rising therapeutic and counselling

professions, consultancies, publications and businesses transform a vast range of private concerns into matters of public contractual relations, expertise, social institutions.

Secondly, new social movements such as feminism, anti-racism, movements for the rights of children or old people, environmentalism – all focus on the public political features of private life and tend to argue that treating private life as private is a way of allowing oppressive power to continue. For example, domestic violence is not a private matter for a woman or child who feels that the violent behaviour of a male head of household is being ignored and therefore implicitly condoned by the law, police and welfare institutions. The slogan that ‘the personal is political’ involves a recognition that private and public life interpenetrate in complex ways and that their separation itself has political significance. An interesting recent example involves childhood which, as we have seen, has often represented the purest sense of privacy: whereas previously state intervention in the private family was justified only by concern for the child’s safety or normal development, a few recent cases have involved children using the public sphere of law to sue their own parents. The underlying argument is that children both can but also *should* have civil rights in the public sphere, and that personal relations within the family can properly be politicized.

Finally – and somewhat ironically – neo-liberalism, privatization and increasing commodification seem to undermine the public/private distinction between state and civil society through which liberalism originally launched this entire train of thought in the first place. More and more institutions which carry out major public functions (health service, education, etc.) are either private or increasingly made up of privately sub-contracted labour. At the same time, the scale (as well as the public role) of many private enterprises has involved increasing government participation or co-operation. An interesting example involves the fate of many inner cities. In ancient times, the centre of the *bios politikos* or public life of citizens was the *agora* which was also, in fact, the marketplace. Throughout history, indeed, the identity of cities and regions has been bound up with ‘city centres’, usually marketplaces, in which a range of economic, political and cultural activities can be carried out on a public stage. Yet recent ‘postmodern’ urban planning which centres on the city as a space of consumption and leisure has often taken the form of the private development of shopping malls and precincts. These can entirely take over the function, or the actual space, of the city centre, literally taking over the very symbol of the public sphere. The mall still fulfils many public functions (a place to congregate, to observe an assembled public and representations of the public nature of the society), yet it is constructed by and for private interests (commerce), and it allows private finance to appropriate public space and to police it (people can be excluded if they look as if they might disturb commerce: the young, the poor, the old). It could be

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argued that the shopping mall indicates the most profound contemporary confusion of public and private: it is a private development which 'simulates' a public sphere which has all but disappeared from contemporary society.

KEY CONCEPTS

PUBLIC Social life is explicable in a number of ways and we inhabit it in a number of different places. The public is that part of life that is shared, visible and accountable. Public life is that which is governed by common norms, rules and values. The public is the realm that is controlled by the state but this is constantly encroaching on the private.

PRIVATE The private is that realm of social life which is most intimate, inward, and concerned with personal identity. It is in the private where the individual can explore that which is non-normative or simply non-consensual. However, within a modern society we can only provide the private with so much sovereignty, we cannot let people cause each other physical damage albeit 'in private'. The private remains, however, the space for the exercise of free will in an increasingly public world. The private world is increasingly penetrated by forms of mass media and communication - people now carry mobile phones so they can be reached 'anywhere'!