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Public and private

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Introduction¹

The public–private distinction is one of the ‘grand dichotomies’ of western thought.² The dichotomy has a complex history, which has generated numerous formulations of the opposition between public and private, most of which still inform contemporary understandings of the terms. In this context, subjecting the public–private dichotomy to critique, as many feminists have done, will inevitably also be a complex project. In this chapter

eminists have done, will inevitably also be a complex project. In this chapter I shall survey contemporary understandings of the public–private distinction and feminist critiques of these. I shall then consider recent feminist moves to go beyond critique, which entail attempts to de-gender the dichotomy, to reconceive the public and the private spheres, and to deconstruct the dichotomy itself. Together these attempts to reconceive the public and the private indicate that it is helpful to retain and rework the concepts, but that they are better understood as different modes of interaction rather than as separate spheres.

1 Differing definitions of public and private

There is no single public–private distinction. Political theorists tend to acknowledge two broad traditions for distinguishing between the public and the private – the classical and the liberal. While both the classical and the liberal traditions share a common emphasis on the importance of a public–private distinction, the nature of the distinction is profoundly different in each.

The public–private distinction is usually cast within liberal discourses as a distinction between market and state. It is standardly interpreted as a governmental, non-governmental distinction among neo-classical economists, whose primary concern is to demarcate the sphere of the ‘public’ authority of the state from the sphere of voluntary relations between ‘private’ individuals in the market. By contrast, the distinction is cast within the classical traditions as an opposition between *oikos* – the domestic sphere of production and reproduction inhabited by women and slaves, and *polis* – where the public is also equated with the political, though not the politics of an administrative state (as in the liberal distinction), but the politics of discussions, deliberation, collective decision-making and action in concert.³ Although liberal discourses have frequently claimed to supplant the classical distinction, they have in practice incorporated many of its elements. As a result, much of the ambiguity surrounding the public–private distinction derives from the fact that two different traditions of political thought are at work in the public–private distinction.

The complexity does not stop there, however, for liberal discourses also frequently invoke a romantic tradition as well. Will Kymlicka suggests that there are two different conceptions of the public–private distinction at work within liberalism: the state–civil society distinction and the social–personal distinction. In the first, civil society is private in the sense that it is not governed by the public power of the state. In the second, which arises later than the first and in some ways may be viewed as a response to it, the personal is private in that it represents a sphere of intimacy to which one might retreat in face of the pressures to conform within society. These two combined create a tripartite, rather than a dual, division of social relations: the state, civil society and the personal.⁴ It is clear that the state is always cast as public. It is equally clear that the personal (when considered within political theory) is cast as private. Confusingly, civil society is cast as private

political theory) is cast as private. Conversely, civil society is cast as private when opposed to the state, and public when opposed to the personal.

In an attempt to highlight the ambiguity concerning the place of the domestic in relation to contemporary understandings of the private, feminist theorists have demanded the explicit recognition of yet another public–private distinction. Neither of the liberal distinctions explicitly invokes the family (which cannot be assumed to be synonymous with the personal sphere of intimacy). By contrast, a third form of the public–private distinction opposes the public, comprising both the state and civil society, with the private, defined institutionally as the relations and activities of domestic life. The intriguing and politically significant issue, which feminist theory draws attention to, is the fact that contemporary liberal theory nowhere explicitly theorises the relation between this third articulation of the public–private dichotomy and either of the other two. For some feminist theorists this neglect renders the entire liberal project suspect. Had the family been viewed as a part of civil society, liberal theorists would surely have been compelled to oppose its hierarchical form and argue for its organisation on the basis of equality and consent as they did with all other forms of civil co-operation.

In response, feminists have tended to label the domestic as private and all else – civil society, government, political deliberation, sociability – as public. The public becomes simply a residual category.⁵ This is not quite a return to the public–private dichotomy of the classical tradition. For while the private did equate, in the work of Aristotle for example, with the household (or *oikos*), the public was equated specifically with the *polis* – a sphere for the practice of citizenship. In the feminist articulation of the divide the account of the private is similar, and fundamentally at odds with accounts of the private within the liberal tradition, but the account of the public is much less theorised and much more eclectic. It frequently entails not only the notion of the polis, but also civil society, and the state. Dichotomous thinking is reproduced within many feminist critiques of the public–private dichotomy, which offer yet another articulation of the nature of the oppositional identities under consideration when we speak of public and private. In this way, some feminist critiques of the public–private dichotomy appear to have gelled into simply another articulation of the dichotomy, to add to the others already in play.

Critiques of *the* public–private distinction must be unravelled then to disaggregate the various strands within these dichotomous discourses. In many respects feminist theorists have been particularly attuned to the operation of this ambiguity: they have focused attention on the incompatibility of the two notions of the private commonly adopted. The liberal tradition depicts a private sphere of voluntary relations between free and equal individuals. The classical tradition offers a private sphere of natural inequality between master and slave, parent and child, husband and wife. Numerous feminist texts have shown how the application of a liberal conception of the private to the domestic sphere has worked to shield the abuse and domination that occurs within it, while the classical conception has worked to justify and perpetuate it. In practice, the ambiguity between

has worked to justify and perpetuate it. In practice, the ambiguity between these two conceptions of the private has worked to the benefit of patriarchal norms, not women. It is for this reason that many feminists have taken the operation of the public–private dichotomy to be essential to understanding women’s oppression.

2 Feminist critiques of the public–private distinction

The feminist literature on the public–private distinction has focused primarily on critiquing the liberal formulation of the public–private distinction. These critiques fall into three broad strands, of which the first criticises the premises of liberalism as being androcentric, the second criticises the extent to which elements of the classical tradition are imported into the liberal model of social contract theory and the third criticises the actual patriarchal practices of ‘liberal’ regimes. While the first of these feminist critiques directly rejects the liberal conception of the public–private distinction, the second suggests that liberalism has been compromised in its theoretical formulation by the importation of classical or patriarchal norms, and the third suggests that, although the public–private distinction proposed by liberalism may in theory be gender-neutral, liberal regimes have in practice worked against the interests of women.

The first critique focuses on the question of subjectivity, claiming the liberal discourse of individual autonomy to be prescriptive rather than descriptive; structuring, rather than simply reflecting, social relations. The liberal theory of the self, as a rational individual engaged in abstract moral reasoning with strong ego boundaries, is not a neutral description of human nature; rather it is part of a discourse that constructs individuals in this image.⁶ Recognition of this fact leads to two further insights. The first is that very particular social structures and institutions are needed to shape individuals into this mould; the second is that this conception of subjectivity may not apply equally to everyone. The first insight leads to a concern with the processes of reproduction, nurturance and socialisation – those material processes which construct people as autonomous individuals.⁷ These are processes which have conventionally been located within the family and so hidden by the liberal construction of the public–private distinction as a state–civil society distinction. The second insight leads to an exploration of the extent to which women have been understood as subordinate, dependent and emotional, and so excluded from the category of ‘individuals’ within liberal theorising.⁸ The discourse that privileges autonomous reasoning as distinctly human has generally assumed women to be incapable of such rationality, and so not properly deserving of the rights granted to individuals by the liberal state. These two issues are linked in women’s status as primary carers. Neither the process of caring and nurturing nor the status of carers

and nurturers are theorised in liberal theory. The concern of feminist theorists is that, as a result of this omission, not only have women been denied the rights and privileges granted to the ‘rational individuals’ of liberal societies, but also that a crucial aspect of life associated with the

liberal societies, but also that a crucial aspect of life, associated with the caring performed by women, has been glossed over. This insight has implications not only for the role of caring as a practice, but also for its role as a perspective. The significance of caring, as both practice and perspective has generated a large feminist literature on the 'ethic of care'.⁹

This critique of the public-private distinction is complemented by a second, which focuses on contract. Here the object of concern is not the rational liberal individual, but liberalism's origins in social contract theory. This contract-based critique places the subjectivity-based critique in historical context. The focus here is the particular social and political forces that created the situation in which women were confined to a private, domestic, care-taking role while men were presumed to be able to move freely between the private (domestic) and the public (civil society and state) spheres. The most influential theorist here is Carole Pateman. She claims that the social contract that generates liberal politics and establishes the political freedom of individuals simultaneously entails the sexual subordination of women in marriage.¹⁰ The social contract that is required to create both civil society and the state requires a sexual contract to accommodate the patriarchy that pre-dates liberalism. The liberal social contract therefore represents the reorganisation, but not the abolition, of patriarchy. Patriarchy was relocated into the private domain and reformulated as complementary to civil society. Moreover, gender is given a highly specific and structuring role within liberal theory at the same time as liberal theory presents itself as gender-neutral. As Pateman influentially suggested: 'Precisely because liberalism conceptualises civil society in abstraction from ascriptive domestic life, the latter remains "forgotten" in theoretical terms. The separation between private and public is thus reestablished as a division within civil society itself, within the world of men.'¹¹

These first two critiques suggest that a holistic rejection of the liberal model of the public-private distinction is needed. It is not just contingent bias in the application of the liberal model that is at fault; the very model is constituted by its exclusion of the dependent, emotional and caring relations that are taken to characterise family relations, and those who are primarily defined by their relation to these – women. By contrast, the third critique of the public-private distinction that emerges within feminist theory is basically supportive of liberalism, seeking only to rid it of patriarchal distortions.

This third critique of the public-private dichotomy, articulated most clearly by Susan Moller Okin, focuses on the historical practice of liberal regimes. It might best be characterised as a weak or limited form of the second, rather than an alternative to it. The charge here is that, notwithstanding the abstract commitment to the importance of a prohibition on state intervention in the private sphere, liberal states have in practice regulated and controlled the family.¹² Not only has this practice been contrary to the fundamental principle of liberalism, it has been adopted in pursuit of a profoundly illiberal end: the perpetuation of patriarchy. While the state adopted this directly non-neutral relation to personal and domestic life, it also upheld practices within the marketplace, which presumed that those engaged in waged work could rely on the support and care of someone

those engaged in waged-work could rely on the support and care of someone at home. To add to the insult, from the perspective of women, the principle of non-intervention in the private sphere has been used by the state to justify inaction regarding cases of child abuse, marital rape and domestic violence. As Zillah Eisenstein has pointed out: 'The state is said to be public (by definition) and therefore divorced from the private realm, which is the area of women's lives. The state can appear through its own ideology, to be unrelated to the family as the private sphere, when in actuality this sphere is both defined and regulated *in relation* to the state realm.'¹³ In short, liberal states have actually enforced patriarchal power relations within the family, while formally denying their responsibility to intervene in familial disputes on the grounds that it is essential to limit state intervention in civil society and personal relations. This tension, arising from the very formulation of liberalism itself, is the inevitable conclusion of the ambivalent role of the family in relation to the private sphere. It emerges as a result of the way in which liberal discourses concerning the public-private distinction inconsistently incorporate classical and patriarchal discourses into their own.¹⁴

All three critiques have effectively highlighted the tension running through contemporary conceptions of the public-private distinction, a tension that grows out of the simultaneous appeal to the classic notion of the private as a sphere of repetitive, domestic drudgery, and the liberal notion of the private as a sphere of unconstrained individual liberty. The critical contribution of the feminist engagement with this dichotomy is to focus on the extent to which women have been made to carry the burden of this tension. While men were encouraged to view the domestic as a sphere of personal privacy (a particular combination of the two liberal distinctions – state-civil society and social-personal), women have frequently experienced it as a sphere of constraint and oppression (a manifestation of a classical, or patriarchal, distinction). The two sexes were apparently living different manifestations of the dichotomy simultaneously. Yet, importantly, both were subsumed within a liberalism that played with the ambiguity to its own benefit. Liberalism, Diana Coole notes 'tends to hold a schizoid attitude toward the private realm as civil society and domestic sphere, modern and traditional, masculine and feminine, individualist and familial, contractual and natural ... Although its inconsistencies are theoretically unsatisfying, in the economy of gender power, they permit an entirely functional flexibility'.¹⁵

Taken together, these three feminist critiques of the public-private distinction draw attention to the way in which the liberal notion still incorporates an earlier classic notion of the public-private distinction as a division between the political sphere and a pre-political natural sphere of the home. They differ in that the second feminist critique (advocated by Pateman) views this incorporation as defining of liberalism itself, while the

third feminist critique (advocated by Okin) views the incorporation as inconsistent with liberalism. They concur though in the assessment that, to the extent that women are part of this home world they become, like slaves, the unacknowledged preconditions of the male public world of autonomous

the unacknowledged preconditions of the male public world of autonomous individuals.

Notwithstanding their differences, feminist approaches to the public–private dichotomy have collectively made three related points. First, most mainstream political theorists have ignored the domestic sphere; second, the public–private distinction is deeply gendered, operating as a discourse that legitimates the assignment of men and women to different spheres of life (which has been particularly oppressive for women, who have conventionally been assigned to a domestic sphere that – as the first point suggests – has been marginalised within political discourses); third, by classifying the family as private, the public–private distinction has frequently worked to shield abuse and domination within familial relations, placing them beyond political scrutiny or legal intervention.¹⁶

Given these critiques, the challenge is to understand how some views of the public–private distinction have oppressed women and to reconstruct, if possible, another understanding of the distinction which does not.

3 Re-theorising public and private

In this context, feminist theorists have turned towards the project of reconceptualising the public and private in new, less gendered ways. There is evidence that the feminist literature on the public–private distinction takes one beyond critique to prescription. Indeed some have suggested that a single alternative feminist model of the public–private distinction has emerged. A recent typology of public–private distinctions proposes four major ways in which the public–private distinction is currently used: the liberal-economistic approach, which focuses on a distinction between state administration and the market economy; the republican-virtue approach, which sees the public realm in terms of political community, distinct from both the market and the administrative state; the anthropological approach, which focuses on the public realm as a sphere of fluid and polymorphous sociability; and the feminist approach, which conceives of the distinction as one between the family and the larger economic and political order.¹⁷ Within this typology feminist critiques become a feminist approach, offering its own normative endorsement of the distinction between public and private.

Yet one need not endorse this ‘feminist approach’ in order to find one or all of the critiques valuable. One can point out the extent to which the public–private distinction has been drawn upon to justify inaction in ‘private’ affairs such as marital rape and domestic violence, without suggesting that this discourse has any significance in theorising what constitutes a just distribution of benefits and burdens in the social world today. Indeed, a closer inspection of the feminist attempts to re-theorise the public–private distinction reveals three distinct strategies rather than a single model. These are first, the de-gendering of the values associated with the public and the private; second, the reconceptualisation of either the public or the private, or both; and third, the deconstruction of the dichotomy itself.¹⁸

the private, of both, and thus, the deconstruction of the dichotomy itself.

In contrast to the early feminist slogan that 'the personal is political', theorists advocating both the first and second strategies surveyed here are unified in their endorsement of the importance of maintaining some form of distinction between the public and the private. Okin, for instance suggests that 'there are some reasonable distinctions to be made between the public and domestic spheres' and Pateman acknowledges that 'the personal is the political' is merely a slogan, which should not obscure the fact that different criteria ought to order our interactions as citizens and as 'friends and lovers'.¹⁹ These strategies attempt 'to break down the rigid demarcation between public and private without obliterating the distinction between these two domains'.²⁰ Accepting the normative desirability of a public-private distinction, theorists worked to first disentangle gender discourses from the dichotomy, then to reconsider the nature of the two entities, public and private, that might best constitute the degendered dichotomy. Much of this thinking is implicitly informed by a desire to reclaim the second liberal-romantic conception of the private as a sphere of intimacy, in the face of the dominance of an ambiguous alliance between the conceptions of the private sphere as a sphere of domestic oppression (and with the classical conception) or of civil contract (as with the first liberal conception). By contrast, the third attempt to rethink the public and private would deconstruct the continued pertinence of the distinction itself.

The first attempt to rethink the public and private focuses on the importance of de-gendering the separate spheres. This approach focuses on the second of the general claims made within the feminist critiques of the distinction, namely, that the public-private distinction is deeply gendered, operating as a discourse that legitimates the assignment of men and women to different spheres of life. An important strategy for undermining the gendered nature of the distinction has involved challenging the idea that women have actually always been confined to the 'private' realm. To accept this claim (even if only to criticise the negative effect that it has had on women), is to perpetuate a patriarchal discourse rather than destabilise it. The reality has always been more complex than this. Working-class women, for example, have rarely been afforded the luxury of remaining entirely within the home.²¹

In addition to producing alternative historical narratives which explore the complexity of male and female relations to the public and private spheres (thereby destabilising the binary narratives that help perpetuate women's confinement to the private), many feminists have urged reforms that would facilitate women's actual increased participation in the public sphere. The ambition here is to allow women access to the participatory political sphere of positive freedom and public recognition along with men. Betty Friedan, for example, saw women's confinement to the private sphere as the source of 'the problem' and encouraged their entry into the public sphere of professional employment and political engagement as the source of their liberation. In so doing, she accepted and reinforced prevailing understandings of the private as natural drudgery and the public as the site of human achievement. Friedan accepted the notion of the private sphere as

of human achievement. Friedman accepted the notion of the private sphere as oppressive, and suggested that women escape its confines as men have done rather than advocating men participate in it more.²²

By contrast, the second attempt to rethink the public and private focuses on the construction of the spheres themselves, not just the gender of their occupants. As part of this broad project feminist theorists have proposed revised conceptualisations of both the private and the public spheres. Susan Moller Okin focuses on the failure of liberal states to extend the principles of justice to the private sphere as the problem, and locates the resolution in an extension of liberal rights to domestic and familial relations. She advocates granting women the rights of negative liberty within the private sphere already claimed by men. Her suggestion is that the liberal notion proper of privacy, as represented by John Stuart Mill's view of the sphere where you can think freely and not be interfered with, has value if agents are in a position to be able to use that privacy constructively. Nonetheless, she accepts a threefold definition of the private sphere as a place for intimate relations with others, a space where one can temporarily shed one's public roles and as a means of securing the time alone to develop one's creativity.²³ In order to realise this ideal she proposes an extension of the principles of liberal justice, already applied to the realm of civil society, to the domestic realm. One could then reclaim and de-gender the liberal conception of privacy, ridding it of its contingent incorporation of non-liberal traditions.²⁴

Similarly Jean Bethke Elshtain depicts the private sphere as a potential sphere of intimate human relations protected from the influence of the political²⁵ and Iris Marion Young proposes a definition of the private as, 'that aspect of his or her life and activity that any person has the right to exclude from others'.²⁶ There is, in these texts, a shared commitment to maintaining a private sphere which is equally realisable for both men and women and a clear acknowledgement that any such sphere will be socially constituted and historically contingent. These writings attempt to reclaim the concept of privacy, endorsing its normative value while distancing it from a geographical location within the domestic sphere. However, various issues remain unresolved in these revisionings. For example, it is unclear whether one can maintain an idea of private affairs which is socially and politically decided without that idea also being 'institutional' in some sense. Moreover, this recovered notion of privacy may be dissociated from the family and the domestic and may not be overtly spatial, but it could well continue to be restrictive in the sense that what one has a 'right to exclude from others' will be decided by the community, or the powerful groupings within it.

In addition to these attempts to map out new, de-gendered conceptions of the private, various new articulations of the public have also recently emerged. Whereas the reconceived models of the private sphere tend to appeal to a liberal tradition, many of the reconceived models of the public sphere have been influenced by Jürgen Habermas's work. His major contribution was to isolate the public sphere as a structure within civil society in which he locates 'the political', which is distinguished from both the narrow conception of politics as the state and a wider notion of the political as power relations.²⁷ This conception of a public sphere is

political as power relations. This conception of a public sphere is characterised by the institutionalisation of the ideal of equality, the existence of rational communication and deliberation on issues of general significance. Many feminist theorists have criticised this model for being overly universalistic and so suppressing concrete difference, which has the effect of marginalising women from the public.²⁸ Yet several aim to revise and 'feminise' this vision of the public sphere rather than reject it.²⁹ Iris Young, for example, proposes a more heterogeneous public, open to 'bodily and affective particularity'.³⁰ Her suggestion is that the public should be open and accessible, which will require the rejection of the tradition of Enlightenment republicanism that, in aspiring to the 'common good', inevitably submerges particularity. If public spaces are to be inclusive, Young maintains, they must promote the positive recognition of differences of perspective, experience and affiliation. The distinction between public and private is maintained, but its association with distinct institutions or human attributes is firmly rejected.³¹

This second type of attempt to rethink the public-private distinction covers a wide range of theoretical perspectives (liberal, republican and postmodern). What binds these together as a group is the determination to retain a distinction between, newly reworked, conceptions of public and private. This commitment stands in contrast to an earlier feminist tendency to adopt an over-inclusive notion of the public as all that is non-domestic, including civil society, the market economy and the political realm. It also contrasts with a more recent tendency to reject the public-private distinction altogether – which characterises the third perspective to be considered.

The third strategy draws on a general deconstructive challenge to dichotomous thinking. Such thinking entails an accepted opposition between two identities, which are hierarchically ordered, where this pair is held to define the whole.³² In other words, it generates two polarised terms, one of which is defined by its not being the other, such that the secondary status of the subordinate term is a condition for the possibility of the dominant one. These two terms are assumed to constitute a whole, not simply parts of an open-ended plurality. The deconstruction of dichotomies, revealing the ways in which each side of a binary division implies and reflects the other, is one of the central methodological devices of an increasingly prevalent theoretical approach, now highly influential within feminist theory.³³

Those who adopt this third approach to the public-private distinction highlight the extent to which previous critiques have reinforced the notion that there actually is a dichotomy at work. When Pateman famously asserted that the public-private dichotomy is 'ultimately, what the feminist movement is about',³⁴ she may have actually entrenched the apparent dichotomy between public and private by accepting its status as a binary divide. More recently, theorists have begun to question this assumption.

Joan Scott, for example, suggests that: 'It makes no sense for the feminist movement to let its arguments be forced into pre-existing categories and its political disputes to be characterised by a dichotomy we did not invent.'³⁵

And Coole argues that 'a dichotomous cartography looks both anachronistic

And Coole argues that a dichotomous cartography looks both anachronistic and complicit'.³⁶ Public and private are consistently presented through a series of spatial metaphors, each space defined by not being its other. Moreover, 'such spaces are normatively interpreted ... on the basis of certain metaphysical judgements about what it means to excel as a human subject'.³⁷ Although the metaphor is a spatial one, there is a disciplinary project embedded within it: 'the location and permeability of this boundary, as well as the association of the spaces it divides with particular groups or qualities, is not about geography, but power'.³⁸ Both activities and populations are spatially distributed, disciplined by the normative hierarchy of spaces.

Following the achievement of women's right to vote and stand for election, the rise of 'girl power' and the feminisation of the workforce, Coole suggests, it is simply not clear that women are any longer primarily confined to, or associated with, the private sphere. Moreover, in the context of diversity politics it is increasingly problematic to assume that 'women' as a coherent category have any single and stable relation to spheres of life: 'Not only are women themselves seen to be differentially distributed across a series of spaces, due to their complex identities, but it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that gender is the privileged index of spatial politics'.³⁹ In the context of the increasing mobility and visibility of populations following new technological developments, it is perhaps no longer remotely realistic to maintain a commitment to privacy as a spatially guaranteed phenomenon. As Peter Steinberger recognises, feminist writers 'have demonstrated, beyond any doubt, that the idea of a separate and distinct sphere of privacy is indeed an ideological distortion, incompatible with our moral institutions and inconsistent with the realities of a complex, highly differentiated society'.⁴⁰

This third approach is committed, like the first, to deconstructing the apparently natural correlation between women and the private sphere, men and the public sphere. It is also committed, like the second, to deconstructing the current dominant binary dualism between public and private. But, unlike the other two, this third approach would deconstruct the pertinence of the dichotomy itself, suggesting that not only patriarchal, but also feminist articulations of the dichotomy are both anachronistic and disciplinary.

Despite the diversity among the proposals to reconstruct the meaning and significance of the public and private, the second group of theorists nonetheless maintain a dichotomous framework and a language of binary spheres. The danger, as Coole points out, is that, 'because feminism is so closely identified with the language of public and private ... we might carry on using it in a situation where it is no longer empirically relevant or politically useful'.⁴¹

Conclusion

Feminist engagement with the public-private dichotomy has resulted in innumerable positive contributions to political theory and practice. On the theoretical level, the most significant contribution has been the uncovering of the place of the domestic within mainstream political theory. Inverting the

the place of the domestic within mainstream political theory. Inverting the standpoint of the observer, feminist theorists looked out from the domestic sphere and asserted that the liberal insistence on labelling civil society as private had the effect of hiding the very existence of the domestic.

Most of the feminist writing on public and private has worked to undermine the stability of the dichotomy in that it has uncovered the historical contingency of any distinction between the public and the private, and has drawn attention to the ambiguities arising from the co-existence of several distinct articulations of the distinction within contemporary discourses. However, it is possible that this writing has become complicit in the perpetuation of the dichotomous thinking that surrounds debates about public and private.

Phillips suggests that the public–private dichotomy ‘was early identified as the crucial underpinning to patriarchal political thought’.⁴² This has been the received wisdom about the public–private dichotomy within feminist theory for a number of years. But this new orthodoxy stands in need of disturbance. We should question ‘whether it still makes sense ... for feminists to privilege this particular spatial division’ if ‘this particular map of gendered space is becoming anachronistic due to changing topography’.⁴³ Were more attention to be paid to the differences between individual autonomy and small-group intimacy, between state administration, market economy, political community and urban sociability, the pertinence of a binary image of spheres would lessen and new explorations in plural spheres might emerge.⁴⁴ Dispensing with the language of dichotomous spheres would allow for either a fuller exploration of the notion of multiple separate spheres, or the rejection of spatial metaphors altogether allowing for a greater focus on the meaning of privacy and publicness, disentangled from the prejudices of geographic tradition.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Andy Mason, Richard Bellamy, Chris Armstrong and Johanna Kantola for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
- 2 N. Bobbio, ‘The Great Dichotomy: Public/Private’, in N. Bobbio, *Democracy and Dictatorship*, tr. P. Kennealy (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
- 3 See H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- 4 W. Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 2nd edn), pp. 388–98.
- 5 J. Weintraub, ‘The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction’, in J. Weintraub and K. Kumar (eds), *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 28.

- 6** Catharine MacKinnon adopts one of the most directly hostile stances in relation to the public/private distinction itself, arguing that the idea of a private realm is 'a means of subordinating women's collective needs to the imperatives of male supremacy': C. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 188.
- 7** N. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1978); M. O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
- 8** K. Green, *The Woman of Reason. Feminism, Humanism and Political Thought* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995); A. Jaggar, 'Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', in S. Kemp and J. Squires (eds), *Feminisms* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 188–93; G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London, Methuen, 1984).
- 9** D. Bubeck, *Care, Gender and Justice* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995); J.B. Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1981); C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982); S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 1989); J. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: The Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, Routledge, 1993).
- 10** C. Pateman and T. Brennan, 'Mere Auxiliaries to the Commonwealth: Women and the Origins of Liberalism', *Political Studies*, 27 (1979), pp. 183–200; C. Pateman, 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy', in S. Benn and G. Gaus (eds), *Public and Private in Social Life* (London, Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 281–303; C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988).
- 11** C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, pp. 121–2.
- 12** S.M. Okin, *Gender, Justice and the Family* (New York, Basic Books, 1989); S.M. Okin, 'Gender, the Public and the Private', in A. Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 116–41.
- 13** Z. Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York, Longman 1981), p. 26.
- 14** Advocates of the second critique, such as Pateman, by and large accept the third critique as well. Whereas Pateman would want to see this as a symptom of a wider interconnection, discussed in the second critique (about social contract theory), Okin characterises this third critique as the totality of the problem.
- 15** D. Coole, 'Cartographic Convulsions: Public and Private Reconsidered', *Political Theory*, 28:3 (2000), p. 343.
- 16** Weintraub, 'The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction', p. 29.
- 17** Weintraub, 'The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction', p. 7.

- 18** Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997) pp. 120–1.
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