

domain of disadvantage that is beyond their control - comprising luck, on the one hand, and exploitation, on the other⁵⁵ - be thought of as the 'natural' background to the practice of non-discrimination, or equal consideration, rather than as the field within which it should be practised? Libertarians do not ask such questions; rather, they appeal to various doctrines⁵⁶ whose combined effect is to close off the political debate where it should begin: over the manifold and complex conditions under which both autonomy and non-discrimination can be enhanced in contemporary societies. They seek, rather, to win the argument by blocking further argument, by capturing the meanings of words - notably 'liberty' and 'equality' - in such a way that these questions no longer arise. Egalitarians, by contrast, make ambitious, and doubtless contestable, claims about what such conditions are. But they at least address the questions; and for that reason alone they can plausibly claim to take both liberty and equality seriously.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 908.

⁵⁶ I have in mind, in particular, the methodological doctrine - methodological individualism - which proscribes all explanations not couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals; a doctrine of property rights which derives from individuals' ownership of their personal powers the right to indefinitely unequal resources as a result of their use; and a doctrine about the nature of society as a 'spontaneous order' (Hayek), of which the market is allegedly the archetype, unamenable to unified direction or indeed rational planning of any kind.

Gender, the Public and the Private

Susan Moller Okin

The concepts of public and private spheres of life have been central to Western political thought at least since the seventeenth century. In some respects, they have origins in classical Greek thought.¹ In much of mainstream (as contrasted with feminist) political theory today, these concepts continue to be used as if relatively unproblematical. Important arguments in contemporary debates depend upon the assumption that public concerns can with relative ease be distinguished from private ones, that we have a solid basis for separating out the personal from the political. Sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly, the idea is perpetuated that these spheres are sufficiently separate, and sufficiently different, that the public or political can be discussed in isolation from the private or personal. As I shall argue in this chapter, such assumptions can be sustained only if very persuasive arguments of feminist scholars are ignored.

Feminist scholarship in various disciplines has placed on the agenda a new category of analysis, gender, which raises many new questions about previous distinctions between public and private spheres. 'Gender' refers to the social institutionalization of sexual difference; it is a concept used by those who understand not only sexual inequality but also much of sexual differentiation to be socially constructed. So far,

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¹ I shall confine my discussion here to Western theories and the cultures from which they emanate. For an interesting cross-cultural study of privacy and the public/private dichotomy (including discussion of the theories and practices of the classical Greeks, Hebrews, ancient Chinese and contemporary Eskimos), see Barrington Moore, Jr, *Privacy: Studies in Social and Cultural History* (Armonk, NY, Sharpe, 1984). Moore concludes that although what is private and the extent to which privacy is valued differ considerably from one society to another, 'it seems highly likely that all civilized societies display some awareness of the conflict between public and private interests', and he finds no culture which does not value privacy of some sort.