

PRIVATE REALM

Private {pri-vate / 'prī-vət /}

- a) Intended for or restricted to the use of a particular person, group, or class
- b) Set apart, belonging to oneself (not to the state), peculiar, personal, used in contrast to “publicus” and “communis”
 - I. In the ancient Greek tradition upon which Hannah Arendt builds, the public realm is for the few. Those who may enter it are the heads of households. Their place in the public realm is made possible by the existence of the private realm.
 - II. It is governed by speech and the discursive art of persuasion. Subjects of the public realm are orators, rational beings engaged in debate. But to be subjects in the public realm, they must first be sovereigns in their own private realms.
 - III. The household is a site of autocratic rule, and its sovereign speaks the inchoate language of violence.
 - IV. The private realm is, by its very nature, hidden. It is the household, the hearth, the family, the site of birth, of copulation, of eating, of defecation, of sleep, of death. It is “prepolitical” inasmuch as it ensures the survival of the species.
 - V. The private, life-sustaining work of “housekeeping” became a public interest with the rise of the social realm, a middle space that blurred the lines between public and private and in so doing eroded both realms. The disappearance of the private realm, Arendt tells us, presents a threat to humanity. The public realm—a high idea—depends upon the private for its existence.
 - VI. What kind of politics begins here?

Private {pri-vate / 'prī-vət /}

- a) Past participle of *privare* “to separate, deprive,” from *privus*
- I. The word “private,” Arendt tells us, shares DNA with deprivation. “In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something.”¹
 - II. Deprivation from what, and for whom?
 - III. Deprivation: not seeing and hearing others, not being seen and heard by others.
 - IV. Those consigned to the private realm, who cannot enter the public realm, have no privacy themselves; they live in someone else’s private realm. As such, they are deprived of speech, of freedom, of their humanity, of the protection of the law.

Private {pri-vate / 'prī-vət / }

- a) *Privare*: to separate or deprive, and the proto-Italic **prei-*—in, meaning “in front” or “before”
- b) Not invested with or engaged in public office or employment; as, a private citizen; private life
 - I. The private realm is by its very nature set apart, spatially delineated. Arendt tells us that in its ancient Greek form the law (*Nomos* / νόμος) was “quite literally a wall, without which there might have been an agglomeration of houses, a town (*asty*) but not a city, a political community.”²
 - II. The law is a wall: a shelter, a prison, a detention center, a port of entry, a foster home, a perimeter, a gate, a door that we close so as not to see ordinary violence.

1 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998), 38.

2 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 6.

- III. Life behind walls, within the private realm, is sometimes a bare life; the household, the place where the ancient Greeks kept slaves, was a strange instantiation of Agamben's "camp," a state of exception contained within the rule. "Law constitutes community through its destitution."³
- IV. The walls of the home separate "political beings" from "bodies."
- V. Floor plans are political precisely because they construct a space beyond political being.
- VI. While we abhor violence in the public realm, we tolerate it in private. It is not the existence of regimes of violence (gendered, racialized) that offends us, but their visibility, their entry into the public realm.
- VII. The wall constructs some bodies as private property, as not political beings.

Private {pri-vate / 'prī-vət /}

- a) Not expressed, withheld
- b) Sequestered from company or observation; appropriated to an individual; secret; secluded; lonely; solitary; as, a private room or apartment; private prayer
 - I. Pain, Arendt notes, is private. It seizes us and holds us within our bodies.
 - II. This is also a kind of strength; to hold ourselves, fully embodied, when our skin becomes a wall.
 - III. We attend to sexual violence in public places, to the violations and deaths that happen in open spaces and to public figures. This violence, which turns people into things, is something we don't want to see (if seeing is a demand, a call to action).
 - IV. The private realm might be understood as a shelter from the public realm, but it also shelters the public realm from the specter of private violence.

3 Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 22.

Private {pri-vate / 'prī-vət /}

- a) Belonging to or concerning an individual person, company or interest
- b) A person of low rank in any of various organizations
 - I. The public realm should not be a place that protects the interests of property owners. It should not be privatized, yet entrance into the public realm was, in the ancient Greek model where this meditation begins, contingent upon owning property. Indeed, the majority of those occupying the private realm were not citizens. They were property.
 - II. While the “other” has long been established at the limit of the human, constructed as outside the wall of the law, those consigned to the private realm were not yet even others.
 - III. They became “others” when they laid claim to the public realm, to the right to appear, to become visible and audible.
 - IV. The exemplary public realm was paid for by those consigned to the private realm. It was built upon the backs of an underclass whose role it was to sustain life itself. Freedom, the freedom of the public realm, is parasitic; it is defined by, and rests upon, unfreedom.
 - V. We live the kind of politics that began here.⁴

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See also

ALIENATION, CITIZENSHIP, LABOR,
SPONTANEITY

4 All definitions adapted from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> and <https://www.etymonline.com/>.