Christensen-Nugues, Charlotte. "Only to the benefit of some private persons': The concept of 'private' in records from the Swedish estates assembly, 1521–1731." *Private/Public in 18th-Century Scandinavia*. Ed. Sari Nauman. Ed. Helle Vogt. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 19–34. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350224926.ch-1>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 11:06 UTC.

Copyright © Sari Nauman and Helle Vogt 2021. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

‘Only to the benefit of some private persons’: The concept of ‘private’ in records from the Swedish estates assembly, 1521–1731

Charlotte Christensen-Nugues

The early modern era sees critical changes in the relations between individual and society, home and community, self and other. A notion of the private, both as a potential threat against communal welfare and stability, and as something worthy of protection, is gradually emerging and can be traced in politics, religious practices, ideas on family and personal relations, as well as in architecture and spatial organization. This development is also reflected in terminology and can be traced through the increased use of words with the root *priv-*, such as *privy*, *privauté* or *privat*.

In this chapter, I explore different uses and meanings of the word *privat* in records from the Swedish *riksdag* (estates assembly) from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth. I investigate how the word was used in different contexts, such as questions concerning, for example, private and public religious practices, relations between individuals and communities, and relations between households and the common good. More specifically, I analyse the concept of ‘private’ in relation to and, as was often the case, in opposition to public welfare and the common good; ‘private’ in relation to secrecy; and, finally, the often ambiguous use of the word *privat* in religious contexts, where it could be used both to describe dangerous and potentially heretic practices, and as something desirable, and even necessary, for a good Christian.

The aim of this study is not to address all issues that we would now describe with words like ‘private’ or its cognates, but rather to explore different uses and meanings of the word *privat* (in its different forms) and how they changed and evolved during the period. Questions, spheres or preoccupations that we would now define as private were not necessarily so described in the early modern era. Words such as *enskild* (individual), *avskild* (separate) or *hemlig* (secret) were in Sweden often used to describe acts, relations or situations that we would now describe in terms of private or related concepts. However, the modern concept of private did not appear out of nowhere sometime in the nineteenth century without any connection to how the word was used before. A study of the historical uses of a word like *privat* can hopefully be of some help to disentangle the different layers of meaning that have contributed to our modern understanding of the private.

Historiographical accounts of private and public in the early modern world have long been dominated by two different perspectives: the first, represented by scholars such as Jürgen Habermas and Reinhart Koselleck, takes politics and the public as its points of departure, while the second, represented by, for example, Philippe Ariès and Roger Chartier, focuses on the history of private life and how it was manifested in family and other forms for sociability.¹ However, these two perspectives necessarily depend on each other, as it is impossible to imagine private without public and vice versa. As Chartier expresses it: '[T]he limits of the private sphere depend primarily on the way public authority is constituted both in doctrine and in fact.'² However, the boundaries between private and public were not fixed, but constantly shifting. In early modern society, private was 'the not public' and thus depended on definitions of public: civil society could be private in relation to state, families in relation to the greater community, individuals in relation to family and so on.³ The distinction between private and public was articulated both descriptively and, perhaps more importantly, axiologically: private and public expressed not only different spheres but also different values.

The primary source material for this study consists of Swedish state records from the period 1521 to 1731. They include records from early state assemblies and similar meetings for the period 1521 to 1617, as well as records from the *riksdag* of the estates for the period 1627–1731. Already in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, some of these records were printed, both to conserve them and to assure better publicity for some of the more important decisions. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Anders Anton von Stiernman published a more systematic collection of governmental decisions and statutes for the period 1521 to 1731.⁴ Finally, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Swedish State Archives decided to publish all surviving early records, and from 1855 and onwards, records of the estates for the seventeenth and eighteenth century have also been made available in modern editions.⁵ This material was recently digitized by the Swedish Royal Library, making an investigation of specific words and concepts such as *privat* possible in the huge body of source material.⁶ I principally rely on this digitized version for this study, in some instances supplemented by earlier printed editions, such as von Stiernman, *Alla riksdagars och möters besluth* (1728–1731) or early modern dictionaries, such as Jonas Petri's Latin-Swedish-German dictionary from 1640.

Debates at the *riksdag* were an important part of, and a driving force behind, societal changes in early modern Sweden.⁷ During the period 1527 to 1660, the estates were established as the political centre of the realm, and from the 1630s and onwards, the *riksdag* of the estates decided in questions concerning legislation, the finances of the realm and warfare. Apart from a period of monarchical absolutism under Charles XI and Charles XII (1682–1718), the crown could never sidestep the *riksdag* for important decisions.⁸

The records of the *riksdag* constitute an important source for the political, economic and social history of early modern Sweden and have been used in several studies.⁹ I am particularly indebted to the works of Swedish historian of ideas Bo Lindberg and his analysis of central political concepts in early modern Sweden and how Swedish gradually developed as a political language.¹⁰ Other works of relevance for the present

study include Martin Melkersson's investigation of changing perceptions of the state in early modern Sweden and the emergence of concepts such as *frihet* (freedom), *individ* (individual) and *medborgare* (citizen) in the late eighteenth century; Magnus Linnarsson's study of debates concerning public or private administration of public services from the 1620s and onwards and Leif Runefelt's study of virtues (and vices) in relation to husbandry and economic thought in early modern Sweden.¹¹

The timeframe of the study, from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century, covers the development of the Swedish state under the Vasa monarchy (*Vasatiden*), the period of consolidation and expansion during the age of great power (*stormaktstiden*), monarchical absolutism under Charles XI and Charles XII, and the first decade of the so-called Age of Liberty (*frihetstiden*). The timeframe corresponds to an early history of the concept of private, before it began to take on meanings more similar to our own.¹² This was also a period when Swedish gradually developed as a political language. The two principal languages for politics in early modern Sweden were Swedish and Latin. They existed side by side but were not necessarily used in the same contexts or with the same aims. Scholarly literature on political theory was written in Latin, but those directly engaged in the politics of the realm expressed themselves in Swedish. Swedish was at the time a poorly developed language, and the Swedish political vocabulary was to a large extent dependent on Latin.¹³ However, classical Latin terminology was not always translatable to the political realities of early modern Sweden (hence the discrepancy that Lindberg describes as 'den antika skevheten', 'the ancient skewness'). This also holds for the word *privat* (*privatus*). Even if *privat* was used with Swedish spelling and grammatical forms, it was essentially perceived of as a foreign, Latin word. In Jesper Swedberg's dictionary, *Swensk ordabok*, from 1716, there is only one entry for a word with the root *priv-*, and that is *privet*, meaning 'toilet/latrine'.¹⁴ In another early modern Swedish dictionary, Haquin Spegel's *Glossarium-Sveo-Gothicum eller Swensk-Ordabook*, there is no entry for any word with the root *priv-* at all.¹⁵ To find early modern definitions of private in Swedish, one must rely on dictionaries from Latin. In Jonas Petri's Latin-Swedish-German dictionary from 1640, *privatus* is translated as 'Synnerlig/egen/thet enom i synnerheet tilkommer' (own, particular, what particularly befalls one person) and 'The som inthet öfwerhett kall bekläda/Priwatz personer' ('those who do not hold an office of authority, private persons').¹⁶ This definition corresponds roughly to how the word was used in the records of the *riksdag*, or at least the ambitions for its use. As we shall see, the political and social realities made the use of *privat* less clear-cut and also contributed to a more ideologically charged use of the word.

Frequency and collocations

This first section concerns frequency and collocations – how often the word *privat* appears in the sources, how this changed over time, and with what other words *privat* was most commonly used. I have only included terms formed by the word *privat*. Some very common terms with the root *priv-* that I have excluded include *privatione officii*

et beneficii (ecclesiastical privation) and *privilegium*, specific privileges held by certain groups or individuals. These terms hold a relatively stable definition, even if their precise content (what kind of privation or privilege) or the persons typically concerned could change over time. I have also excluded occurrences of *privat* within texts written wholly in Latin or other non-Swedish languages such as German. I have, however, included Latin forms of *privat* (*privatus*, *privati*, *in privato*, *privatorum*, etc.) in texts otherwise written in Swedish.

My material covers the period from 1521 to 1731, but I have very few examples from the sixteenth century. One reason is that there are simply very little written documents left from this period. But even within the existing material there is a much greater prevalence of the word *privat* in material from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century than from the sixteenth. To just take some examples: the material from 1521 to 1560 covers about 800 pages in the printed editions and there are altogether eight occurrences of the word *privat*, including three in Latin texts and two in German.¹⁷ The word appears more frequently from 1600 and onwards: in the material from 1617, that covers approximately 300 pages, it appears fourteen times, and in the records from the noble estate for 1664, *privat* appears no less than thirty-one times.

Table 1.1 shows all occurrences of the word *privat* in my material. I have divided the material into double decades (except for the last period, 1720–1731) and compared the occurrences of *privat* with the total number of words for each double decade. It should be noted that there are no records at all for the period 1598–1611 in my material (only a few pages from Stiernman) and the records from 1611 to 1632 are also somewhat decimated due to a great fire that destroyed most of the royal archive in the castle of Stockholm in 1697.

The first thing to observe is that *privat* was not a common word. In the sixteenth century, there are only a handful of occurrences, and the frequency is less than 0.5

Table 1.1 Occurrences of the word *privat* by double decade for the period 1521 to 1731, as compared to the total numbers of words.

Decades	Total number of occurrences	Occurrences per 10.000 words
1521–1539	5	0.20
1540–1559	2	0.18
1560–1579	11	0.34
1580–1599	31	0.28
1600–1619	22	0.57
1620–1639	21	0.58
1640–1659	103	1.04
1660–1679	157	1.63
1680–1699	152	2.66
1700–1719	147	1.13
1720–1731	366	1.1

in 10,000 words. The total number of occurrences augments significantly in the seventeenth century, especially after the 1640s. This is mostly due to a much larger source material from this period but also to a more frequent use of *privat* in the records. In 1640 to 1660, the frequency of the word *privat* is 1.04 in 10,000 words, and this rises to 2.66 in 1680–1700. In the early eighteenth century, the frequency drops to a little more than one occurrence in 10,000 words.¹⁸ One possible explanation for the increased use of *privat* during the late seventeenth century is the rise of monarchical absolutism that made arguments opposing private benefit to the good of the state particularly useful. The reductions during the same period also generated a significant number of occurrences of *privat*, especially in the collocation *privatorum händer*, to designate estates fallen into 'private hands' that ought to be returned to the crown. What the numbers tell us more generally is that the word *privat*, from having been nearly inexistent in the sixteenth century, gradually enters the political language, albeit at a modest level, in the seventeenth century.¹⁹ The number of occurrences can seem quite limited, but private is not a very common word in more recent times either, at least not in state records. If we look at corresponding sources from the 1970s, we get substantially the same results. In records from the Swedish *riksdag* from 1970, occurrences of *privat* oscillate between 1.1 and 1.8 in 10,000 words.²⁰ This does not mean that the word 'private' was used as frequently in the seventeenth century as in the twentieth in general – only that it occurs about as often in the specific political context covered by the records.

The first occurrence of the word *privat* in my material is in the context of the forced resignation of Archbishop Gustaf Trolle in 1523. According to the *Rigesens Råd*h (Council of the Realm), the bishop had, through his crimes against his fatherland, forfeited both life and estate. However, they decided to let mercy precede law 'so that he must resign the archbishopric, give himself over to the pope, and then lead a quiet private life'.²¹ This is also the first occurrence of the word *privat* (and any combination thereof) recorded in the *Swedish Academy Dictionary*, SAOB, which records historical usages of Swedish terms. 'Private life' is otherwise not a common collocation in the records, and other collocations such as *privatz person* (private person), *privatorum händer* (private hands) or *privat nytthe* (private gain) figures much more prominently.

Table 1.2 shows the most common collocations with the word 'private' in my material. I have only included collocations that appear at least five times.

The collocations in the table were obtained using a window of five words, that is, within five words to either side of *privat*. I then excluded so-called empty words, such as *och*, *den*, *också*, *för* (and, the, also, for), etc. The most common collocation is with 'person' (e.g. *privats person*, *private persohner*, *privatpersoner*). This group becomes even more important when we consider Latin forms corresponding to private person(s) such as *privatus* and *privati*. The prevalence of collocations with the word 'person' is not astonishing. Most entries concern what people do and can do, and/or what they have the right to do. During the early modern era, with a growing state administration staffed by state officials, it became increasingly important to distinguish both between private and public persons and between what an office holder did as part of his official duties and what he did as a private person.²²

Table 1.2 Most common collocations with the word *privat*. I have also included composite words such as *privatpersoner* (private persons), *privatsaker* (privat things) and *privathus* (private house).

The second most common collocation is with 'public' (*publik, publicus, publique*). This collocation often intersects with persons but also with things and, to some extent, with all other collocations. This does not mean that private was opposed to a fixed idea of the public. As mentioned above, the boundaries were constantly shifting and something that was private in one context could be public in another. Even if the word 'public' is not pronounced, 'private' is in general defined in opposition to, or as an absence of, something larger and/or more official such as the common good,²³ state or crown. The collocation 'private things' typically refers to matters, concerns or businesses that are not public or official and do not pertain to the state or a greater community but to a person (or a household) as a separate entity. Sometimes the adjective *enskylt* (separate, individual) is appended to further underscore the non-public, non-official character of the matter in question.²⁴

Collocations with words such as *nytta* (benefit) or *interesse* (interest) are relatively common and would be more common still if less frequent words with similar meaning, such as *vinning* (gain) or *fördehl* (advantage), also were included in the table. These collocations are nearly always used in a pejorative sense, in opposition to the common good or the interest of the crown. In the very few cases when 'private' was used with words such as *iniuria* (injury) or *skadhe* (damage) it was, on the contrary, either to defend private interests/persons or to demonstrate virtuous willingness to suffer private injury for the common good.

As mentioned above, the collocations in the table were obtained using a window of five words, but if we only count words directly adjacent to *privat* we get substantially the same results: the most common collocation is still 'private person(s)' with sixty-four occurrences, followed by 'private things' (forty-four

occurrences), 'private hands' (thirty-six occurrences) and 'private benefit/interest' (twenty occurrences).²⁵ The most important difference is the complete absence of collocations with the word 'public' when only counting directly adjacent words. This is simply because there is always a word (*och, eller, et, vel, aut, etc.*) between 'private' and 'public' in my material – hence the necessity of using a wider window than simply adjacent words.

Textual statistics concerning frequency and collocations can give some interesting indications, but it does not say very much about *how* the word *privat* was actually used; in what contexts it proved useful; with what aims it was used; and its positive, or, as was mostly the case, negative connotations. There are also a number of 'blind spots', notably religion. Notions of the private had particular significance in some religious contexts, such as questions concerning religious practices of non-Lutherans or prohibitions of private religious gatherings for Lutherans. Yet there are very few collocations with identifiable 'religious terms'. However, some collocations that at a first glance seem to have nothing to do with religion, such as *privat huus* (private house) or *private sammankomster* (private gatherings), are mostly found within religious contexts.²⁶ The same holds for words such as *enskylt* (individual/separate) or *afskylt* (secluded). A significant number of collocations with 'public' are also found in the religious realm, for example, when debating the religious practices of non-Lutherans.

Another problem is that words or concepts used in opposition to private often do not appear even when using a relatively large window. In a phrase such as 'exhorted them all to disregard what could be disadvantageous for their private interest but rather with zeal and sacrifice regard the common good', the important distinction is between private interest and common good, but that cannot be observed unless using an extremely wide window.²⁷ In the following sections, I will turn to the texts themselves and investigate more closely some specific contexts when the word *privat* was typically used.

Public need and private interests

In early modern society, the terms 'public' and 'private' were considered 'relational', that is, they each depended on the other.²⁸ However, the boundaries were not fixed, but constantly shifting and often ambiguous. The notion of *privatus* (private person) as opposed to persons holding a public office was relatively clearly defined in classical Roman law, but was not always easy to apply in early modern society and politics.²⁹ In early modern monarchies, it could be difficult to distinguish between public power and the personal power of the king. It was also often unclear when an office holder was acting within his office or as a private person.³⁰

Even though the boundaries between private and public were often blurred, there was, as Bo Lindberg has pointed out, an ambition to make a clear distinction.³¹ Several entries, especially from the seventeenth century, attest to this drive to define and separate public from private: the *riksdag* should consider 'that there is

great difference between public and private,³² 'public law should be distinguished from private,'³³ 'one must distinguish between private and public persons,'³⁴ and, concerning royal authority, 'distinguish and separate between a private person and a king'.³⁵ Other entries describe what can (or cannot) be done or said both publicly and privately. So, for example, are non-Lutherans forbidden to practise their religion both publicly and privately,³⁶ the people are exhorted to pray for the King and all authority both privately and publicly,³⁷ and, in 1686, the estate of clergy states that harmful novelties, and especially the Cartesian philosophy, should not be propagated either publicly or privately.³⁸

The distinction between private and public could also be used as an argument to hinder or further the actions of certain persons. During the debate concerning the contested will of Charles X Gustaf (1622–1660, r. 1654–1660), the notion of private was used as an argument to exclude the king from making a legally binding testament: 'Wills pertain to private law and not to public law [...] As long as a king is a king, there is nothing domestic or private to take into consideration in him, all is public.'³⁹ The question of whether a person is considered to be private or public, what she can do in either case, and how she can do it was also an important argument in the debate concerning the religious practices of Queen Christina (1626–1689, r. 1632–1654) when she returned to Sweden in 1660 and 1667. Queen Christina had abdicated the throne in 1654 and officially converted to Catholicism shortly thereafter, and the question of whether she should be allowed to practise her 'papist' religion when in Sweden became a contentious issue. The queen, writes the estate of clergy, should not be considered *ut privata* (as a private person) and therefore her religious practices, whether she exercised them publicly or privately, were of utmost importance for the whole realm.⁴⁰

The strong relation between public and private should not lead us to the anachronistic conclusion that private and public were perceived of as complementary, equally legitimate spheres. In some instances, especially in terms derived from Roman law, 'private' denoted a clearly defined sphere or division (e.g. *jus privatum*, 'civil law'). Otherwise, 'private' was before 1700 essentially a negative term, used to describe 'whatever did not pertain to the nation and community'.⁴¹ 'Public' was, as Conal Condren has pointed out, strongly associated with moral, legitimate office holding, not only within spheres that we would now consider as 'public', but also in relation to, for example, parenthood or husbandry.⁴² 'Private', on the other hand, connoted absence of legitimate, moral office holding and is in my material very often presented in direct opposition to public interest, the good of the community or the needs of the crown.

This opposition appears in phrases such as: 'not to the Crown, but to the benefit of private persons'⁴³; 'for the private benefit of a few, the public is overthrown'⁴⁴ or 'to the detriment of all, for the private benefit of a few'.⁴⁵ The word *privat* frequently appears in the context of corruption or abuse, often in collocations such as *privat nytthe* (private benefit) or *privat interesse* (private interest). Means dedicated to the defence of the realm or to appease troubles and misery were *förryckiadt* (stolen), *wändt* (turned) or simply *nyttiadt* (used) for private benefit or interest. In 1617, Gustaf II Adolph (1594–1632, r. 1611–1632) addressed the estates concerning taxes levied for the war. He emphasized that taxes imposed to defend 'our Christian faith and blessedness, our Fatherlands freedom' should go directly to the king and not, as unfortunately

had often been the case before, 'be taken away and used for private benefit'.⁴⁶ Private use of public means was frequently denounced, and in 1686 the estates are reminded that such means have been accorded 'by *allmogen* (the common people) for the *allgemene* (common) welfare and not for any-one's private benefit'.⁴⁷ Private benefit was moreover often described as the benefit of some few private persons against not only the crown or the public good, but also against people in general: 'to the detriment of all for the private benefit of a few'.⁴⁸ At times the term 'private person' was used in direct opposition to people. When the estate of clergy criticized how Palmstruck had governed the newly established banking office, they stated 'that mostly some private persons have had benefit thereof, to the detriment of so many *menniskior* (people)'.⁴⁹

Growing notions of 'patriotic solidarity' and the requirement to subordinate personal gain to the benefit of the state contributed to a moralizing use of private in opposition to the common good.⁵⁰ In times of danger or need, the rights and freedoms that private people could normally enjoy must be subordinated to the common good. This argument was notably used during the period of monarchical absolutism to legitimate extraordinary powers of the crown: 'civil laws must rest and the rights of private persons in many cases fall, when the public is in danger'.⁵¹ In 1682, the king, wishing to curb insubordination against rules and measures taken by the crown, urged the noble estate 'that they, as upright patriots, now as before, put all private interest away and seek to promote the public'.⁵²

The public (state, crown or common good) was associated with duty and sacrifice, while the private was associated with absence of such commitments. In 1614, the king declared that he understood his subject's wish for peace, comfort and the possibility to devote themselves to their private and own affairs. However, he continued, nobody suffered as much as the king, who even in times of peace always, through his high royal office, had to care for the welfare of the realm.⁵³ For less exalted persons, it was a sign of virtuous, patriotic behaviour to sacrifice one's own private affairs for the good of the state. In 1627, the noble estate humbly accepted conscription of their peasants to strengthen the army and thereby 'defend the realm and our own welfare' even if it, as they pointed out, 'did great damage to them in private'.⁵⁴

The representations of private and public were not wholly black or white. Private enterprise was at times necessary and could also be considered as beneficial for society as a whole. During the seventeenth century, the Swedish state outsourced parts of the public services (e.g. within the post service, tax collection and certain custom duties) to private entrepreneurs.⁵⁵ These private entrepreneurs were often criticized for selfishness and short-sighted profiteering, but the state still needed them. Other enterprises, institutions or assets could be presented as beneficial both to the public and to private persons. Sweden's first bank, *Stockholms Banco* founded in 1656, was described in 1660 as 'such a useful institution, for the public as well as for private persons'⁵⁶; the office of justice in 1664 as 'such a beneficial institution, both for the public and for all the inhabitants of the realm in private'⁵⁷; and, at the *riksdag* of Stockholm in 1668, the exploitation of Sweden's natural resources was described as fundamental 'both to the common good as well as to each and every-one's private needs'.⁵⁸ In the beginning of the Age of Liberty, there are several entries that describe both public and private benefices of newly founded companies or institutions and warn for measures that could

impede private enterprise.⁵⁹ There are even, from the beginning of the 1730s, statements that explicitly question the opposition between private and public benefit: '[it is] an infallible sign of a badly ordered state, when the *allmänna* (public) should be obtained through the want or poverty of *privatorum* (private persons).'⁶⁰ However, even when considering this later period, associations between 'public' and 'private' good remain quite rare compared to the much more common opposition between what is good for society as a whole and the interests of private persons. The overwhelming impression is that of a perceived conflict between the common good and private interests, the latter often associated with corruption or at least self-serving behaviour.

Secrecy, discretion and the private

The word 'private' was not only used in relation to something more 'public' (be it the Crown, people or the common good) but also, more specifically, in connection to secrecy and discretion.⁶¹ Jonas Petri's Latin-Swedish-German dictionary gives two definitions of *privatus*: the first as bereft of public functions, and the second as 'Synnerlig/egen/thet som enom i synnerhet tillkommer' (specific, own, what particularly belongs to one person). The related, and frequently used adverb *privatim*, is translated into Swedish as *hemlig* (secret). In my material, the word 'private' is often associated with words such as *eenshylt*, *för sigh siälfw* (separate, apart) or *afshyld* (secluded). 'Private' was sometimes used nearly synonymously with 'secret' (*privat confession* / *heml. bekänneelse*), and often in a derogatory sense, for example, to describe secret and underhand dealings (*privateske handel*). The adverb *privatim* appears in expressions and phrases such as *communicera privatim* (communicate privately/secretly), to *privatim afshielpa* (privately/secretly remedy) or to make use of unofficial/secret ways to obtain political aims: 'through intrigues *privatim* bring an estate to this or that opinion'.⁶²

We are used to a society where the state is expected to act openly and publicly while ordinary citizens should be accorded a private sphere separated from the public realm. In the early modern era, the situation was rather the opposite: secrecy was potentially dangerous when practised by private persons, but the state was expected to act in secret. Early modern regimes tended to view secrecy as a legitimate part of governance, and the term *arcana imperii* (originally from Tacitus's *Annals*) became a key concept for the theory of rational and efficient government.⁶³ Discretion and secrecy were necessary to sustain and expand political power, and crucial political knowledge was best restricted to the smallest possible group. When Gustaf II Adolph founded the *Secreta utskottet* (Secret Committee) in 1627, it was well understood that this committee should deliberate questions that demanded particular discretion: 'saak som icke allmen bör vetas' (things that should not be generally known).⁶⁴ The workings of the committee should be kept secret and only a restricted number of persons were allowed to participate. *Secreta utskottet* should deliberate questions of particular interest to the public realm, while questions concerning private persons or interests could be deliberated more openly. The instructions for the committee from 1727 state that questions of whether treaties and alliances had been executed with regards to the public realm were to be handled

by *Secreta utskottet*, while questions concerning private persons who could have pretensions through the peace treatises could be communicated and investigated *in pleno*.⁶⁵

Words such as 'private' or 'secret' were also used more generally when there was reason to keep a matter or a conversation unofficial. Some things were better said privately and secretly than with the authority of formal office. When representatives from the estate of clergy interrogated the *riksdrots* (chancellor of the realm) about the religious practices of Queen Christina in 1660, he answered that he did not want to speak of these matters as a *Regeringzperson* (person of government) but could say something in *privat familiar diskurs* (private familiar discourse) that he wanted to be kept secret.⁶⁶ Economic matters could also be considered delicate enough to require special discretion. In 1650, members of the estates demanded that economic difficulties should be handled by a particular committee because people did not want to show their poverty publicly but rather treat it privately with the king,⁶⁷ and during the establishment of the state treasury in 1664, the noble estate warned that 'a private person does not much like to have his economic situation made public'.⁶⁸ In some situations, a private admonition was deemed more appropriate than a public or formal warning: swearing servants should first be admonished by the housefather, then privately by the parish priest,⁶⁹ and priest, who in their sermons deviated from Lutheran orthodoxy, should, if possible, be admonished privately to avoid disturbances in the congregation.⁷⁰ More generally, *inbördes admonitio privata* (mutual private admonitions) were part of a Christian's duty towards his fellow Christians.⁷¹ The notion of 'private admonition' had, as Johannes Ljungberg's contribution indicates, particular significance during the Pietism controversy in the early eighteenth century.

The private and Lutheran orthodoxy

The notion of 'private' had important implications in the context of religion, particularly concerning the religious practices of foreign, non-Lutheran diplomats, workers or manufacturers, and the religious practices and gatherings of Lutherans in places other than the Church (the latter finally leading up to the prohibition of such gatherings in 1726).⁷²

In the case of religious practices of non-Lutherans, the notion of 'private' was used to distinguish and describe the only possible way for them to legitimately practise their religion. Religious unity was considered essential for national unity, and non-Lutherans were generally denied the right to practise their religion. However, Sweden was also much in need of foreign competence, for example, in the ironworks and textile industry, and exemptions could be granted for religious immigrant groups. In his *konungaförsäkran* (royal declaration) from 1611, King Gustaf II Adolph emphasized Lutheran orthodoxy and promised that no one of another religion ('Papist', Calvinist, Anabaptist or anyone else) would have the right to hold any office in Sweden. However, if any foreign *privatz-personer* (private persons) needed to be in the country for trade or military reasons, they could be allowed to practise their religion in private, as long as they kept 'silent and calm and did not spread

their heresy'.⁷³ Very much the same formulation was used in the project for a royal declaration some hundred years later: foreign merchants or artisans could have the right to practise their religion 'för sig sielfwe i sine huus' (among them-selves in their houses) as long as they did it 'in privato stilla ock utan förargelse' (in private, calmly and without disturbances).⁷⁴ Moreover, the right to privately practise a non-Lutheran religion was something that according to the noble estate should be accorded privately to certain groups and not publicly through an open placard.⁷⁵ *Privat* is in this context often associated with words such as *stilla* or *roolig* (calm), *afshyllt, för sig sielfw* (secluded, among them-selves), *utan förargelse* (without disturbance).

In the case of religious practices of Lutherans, the word *privat* was often used to describe the dangers of a practice that was disorderly, undisciplined and potentially heretic. If non-Lutherans ought to practise privately in secluded places, Lutherans, on the other hand, ought to practise openly and publicly. The first remarks on religious practices that include the word *privat* in my material date from the end of the sixteenth century and concern private confessions (as opposed to *almennelige skriftermål*, public confessions).⁷⁶ The word *privat* appears more and more frequently in this context from the middle of the seventeenth century and onwards, especially in the collocation 'private house'.⁷⁷ At the *riksdag* in Stockholm 1660, the clergy warned that the Church's public ministry risked being despised because of the frequent preaching and use of the sacraments in *privat huus* (private houses).⁷⁸ Four years later, they declared that the *Gudztienst* (worship) should be held in churches and not in private houses.⁷⁹ Over time, such complaints became more pressing and private house preaching and religious ceremonies outside of church were denounced for creating great disorder and making the people 'säkert och sielffwördigt' (self-assured and undisciplined).⁸⁰

However, the meaning of 'privata och enskylda sammankomster' (private and separate gatherings) as well as the status of private religious practices was, as the clergy admitted, 'a very difficult question'.⁸¹ Why should one complain about private meetings among fellow Christians, when all, according to the Lutheran faith, were *andelige präster* (spiritual priests) who could and should instruct each other?⁸² The *konventikelpakat* of 1726 explicitly accepted private religious devotion in the household, but what if a father, for example, held a *privat husandacht* (private house devotion) and someone incidentally came by and then stayed on for his own edification?⁸³ Was there not a Christian value in private worship and edification among fellow Christians? There was an ambiguity in how 'private' should be understood, and the risks, as well as values, that it represented in this context. On the one hand, private gatherings and practices could foster disorderly, undisciplined behaviour and in the worst case lead to heresy, but on the other hand, private religious practices, as well as private mutual instruction and admonition, were also something desirable, and even necessary, for a good Christian.

Concluding remarks

It is impossible to conclusively define early modern understandings of the term 'private', even within such a relatively restricted source material as records from the Swedish *riksdag*. 'Private' was essentially a negative term and was defined as an

absence of, or in opposition to, something larger and/or more official. This could be the public, the state or the crown but also the people, inhabitants of the realm, or any larger community in general. The institutions, communities or persons, against which private was defined, could change according to context and the boundaries were constantly shifting.

'Private' was not only negative in the sense of absence or opposition, but also in terms of value. 'Private' denoted absence of legitimate office, indifference to the common good, and unwillingness to sacrifice one's own comfort for a higher purpose. At times, the word *privat* seems more like a rhetorical device to denounce self-serving, egoistical and unpatriotic behaviour than as a meaningful description of different spheres or preoccupations. It is difficult, for example, to understand the meaning of an opposition between 'private persons' and 'people' (see the example on Palmstruck and the banking office above), except as a way to denounce a certain behaviour or a certain set of persons.

We are used to a society where the private, or privacy, is viewed as a positive value and as something worthy of protection. This was not the case in early modern society. Private gain and enterprise could be viewed as something positive as long as they served the interests of the state or the greater community, but this is not the same thing as regarding the private as a value in itself. The private, in the sense of secret, could be useful, and even necessary for political reasons, but the private was not viewed as a protected, or even desirable, sphere for ordinary persons. The only context where there was at least an opening, or an ambiguous space, for a positive definition of private was in the religious realm. Even if the word *privat* in the religious context was mostly used to denounce secret, secluded acts or gatherings, it could also express a desirable, and even necessary part of a Christian's life and faith.

Notes

- 1 Key texts are Habermas 1962, Koselleck 1973 and Ariès, Duby and Chartier 1986. For an overview and analysis of the historiography, see Goodman 1992, 1–20.
- 2 Chartier 1986, 15.
- 3 Brewer 1995, 9–10.
- 4 Stiernman 1728–33 and 1743.
- 5 *Svenska riksdagsakter*, 1. 1, vol. 1–4 (1521–1611); *Ibid.*, 1. 2, vol. 1–2 (1611–1617); *Ibid.*, 2, vol. 1–3 (1719–1734); *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, vol. 1–17 (1627–1697); *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll från och med 1719*, vol. 1–32 (1719–1779); *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, vol. 1–13 (1642–1752); *Borgarståndets riksdagsprotokoll före frihetstiden*; *Borgarståndets riksdagsprotokoll från frihetstidens början*, vol. 1–10 (1719–1752); *Bondeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, vol. 1–13 (1720–79). For this material, see also Förhammar 2011, 19–46 and Lindström 2011, 61–80.
- 6 The digitized material was made available in March 2018 at <https://riksdagstryck.kb.se>.
- 7 Linnarsson 2017, 14.
- 8 *Ibid.* See also Schück 1992, 11–66 and Rystad 1992, 67–123.

- 9 For the relevance of parliamentary sources in conceptual history, see Ihalainen and Palonen 2009.
- 10 Lindberg 2006, 2014.
- 11 Linnarsson 2017; Melkersson 1997; Runefelt 2001.
- 12 Cf. the concept of *Sattelzeit* (ca. 1750–1850), when, according to Koselleck 1972, central political concepts gained meanings that approach the present day.
- 13 Lindberg 2006, 25–6.
- 14 Swedberg 2009 [1716], 501.
- 15 Spegel 1712.
- 16 Petri 1640.
- 17 The German text *Memoriall etzlicher anderen beyhantel, dar ahn geleghen* was included in the records from the meeting in Arboga in 1544 and include references to ‘privaten sachen’ and ‘Dennemarkische privaten fur sich und unns nit angehendt handelunge’, *Svenska riksdagsakter* 1. 1, vol. 1, 424.
- 18 The code, developed by Pierre Nugues, as well as generated statistics is available at https://github.com/pnugues/stats_textuelles/tree/master/débats du riksdag.
- 19 The political counterpart of ‘private’ – ‘public’ – is used about two times more frequently (mostly in its Latin forms) and reaches three to four occurrences in 10,000 words by the end of the seventeenth – beginning of the eighteenth century. As with *privat*, there are very few occurrences of *publi[k/c/que]* for the period 1521 to 1640. From the 1640s and onwards, the relative frequency ranges from 2.7 to 3.9/10,000. Exact numbers are available at https://github.com/pnugues/stats_textuelles/tree/master/débats du riksdag.
- 20 *Riksdagens protokoll. Första kammaren* 1970, A01, vol. 1; *Riksdagens protokoll. Andra kammaren* 1970, B01, vol. 1. See exact numbers at https://github.com/pnugues/stats_textuelles/tree/master/débats du riksdag.
- 21 ‘Således at han Erchiebiskopzdömet resignera motte/och uthi Påwens wäld och händer öffuergiffua/och sedan ett roligt Priwatz leffuerne föra’, Stiernman vol. 1, 1728, 5.
- 22 See Lindberg 2006, 121–2.
- 23 The notion of ‘common good’ was very important in early modern society and the distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ can often be more adequately approached using this term instead of ‘public’. See Linnarson 2017, esp. 12 and 41.
- 24 So, for example, was the phrase *som een privat och eenschylt saak anlangar* (that concerns a private and individual matter), used in 1617 to distinguish between political and private correspondence with the enemy (both should be punished, but the latter a bit less harshly than the former). *Svenska riksdagsakter* 1. 2, vol. 2, (1617), 157. *Enskylt*, as well as *afskylt*, was otherwise mostly used in the sense of secret, hidden, secluded.
- 25 The less frequent collocations are also approximately the same: ‘lawsuits’ (18), ‘house’ (11), ‘requests’ (9) and ‘matter’ and ‘business’ (5 each). Exact numbers are available at: https://github.com/pnugues/stats_textuelles/tree/master/débats du riksdag.
- 26 The notion of ‘private conversation’ (as opposed to formal or public conversation) had particular significance in conflicts over Pietism in 1720s Sweden. See Johannes Ljungberg’s chapter in this volume.
- 27 ‘Förmaante dem alle ifrå någet, som af privat interesse kunde wara der emot, uthan heller med nijt och ofwer till de allgemene bästa’, *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 5 (1655), 47.
- 28 Condren 2009, 21.

- 29 For the definition of *privatus* in classical Roman law, see Berger 1953, 651.
- 30 On the confusion between public and private actions of an office holder, as well as the problem of corruption, see Sari Nauman's contribution in this volume.
- 31 Lindberg 2006, 121–2.
- 32 'Att stohr åtskildnat är emellan publicum och privatum', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 10 (1668), 317.
- 33 'Att publicum jus distingveras ifrån privato', *ibid.*, 328.
- 34 'Distinguendum inter personas privatas et publicas', *ibid.*, 9 (1664), 79.
- 35 'Distingveras och åtskillias imellan een privat person och een konung', *ibid.*, 11 (1672), 74.
- 36 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 2 (1660–1664), 406.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 474.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 4 (1680–1714), 304.
- 39 'See wij till materiam testamenti, så är then juris privati och icke publici [...] Så widha en Konungh är Konung, så kommer inthet domesticum eller privatum hos honom i consideration, uthan alt publicum', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 7 (1660), 64. For the debate concerning the will of Charles X Gustaf, and especially the importance of oaths in this context, see Nauman 2017, 115–16.
- 40 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 2 (1660–1664), 434.
- 41 Longfellow 2006, 31.
- 42 Condren 2009, 21.
- 43 'Kom icke så Cronan, uthan mehr privat personer till nytta', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 5.1 (1652–1654), 41.
- 44 'För någre privats nytta måtte publicum everteras', *ibid.*, 5.2 (1655), 23.
- 45 'Allom ett förfångh för någres privat nyttra', *ibid.*, 24.
- 46 'Wår christelige troo och saligheet, wårt Fädherneslandz frijheet', 'förryckias och wändas till privat nyttther', *Svenska riksdagsakter*, 1. 2, vol. 2 (1617), 148.
- 47 'Af allmogen till det allgemene bästa och ingens privat nytta bevilliade', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 15 (1686, 1689), 382.
- 48 'Allom ett förfångh för någres privat nytta', *ibid.*, 5.1 (1652–1654), 24.
- 49 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 2 (1660–1664), 485.
- 50 Lindberg 2006, 121–2.
- 51 'Leges civiles måste hvijla och privatorum rätt i många stycken falla, när publicum löper fahra', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 15 (1686), 199.
- 52 'Att dhe som redelige patrioter, nu som förr, sätta alt privat interesse effter och sökia främia dät publike' *ibid.*, 14 (1682), 229.
- 53 *Svenska riksdagsakter* 1. 2, vol. 1–2 (1614), 382.
- 54 'Rijket och vårt eget vålståndh dermed att defendere', 'oansedt ded [*sic*] dem in privato till stoor skada länder', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 1 (1627), 81.
- 55 Linnarsson 2017, 39–59.
- 56 'Itt så publico som privatis här till nyttigt wärk', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 7 (1660), 281.
- 57 'Itt så publico som alle richsens inbyggjare in privat[o] helsosamt värck', *ibid.*, 9 (1664), 355.
- 58 'Både till thet allmenne bästa så vähl som hvars och ens privat tarfvor', *ibid.*, 10 (1668), 547.
- 59 See, for example, the delegation for economy and commerce (*ekonomi- och kommersdeputationen*) in 1726. *Borgarståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 3 (1726–1727), 738.

- 60 'Ett ofehlbart tecken till en illa bestält republique, när det allmänna ska ricktas igenom privatorum afsaknad eller fattigdom', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll från och med 1719*, 7 (1734), 581.
- 61 For connections between private and secret see Camilla Schjerning's chapter in this volume
- 62 'Genom intrigues privatim bringa något ståndh på een eller annan mening', *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 9 (1664), 159.
- 63 Horn 2011, 103–22.
- 64 *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 1 (1627–1632), 58.
- 65 *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll från och med 1719*, 4 (1727), 52.
- 66 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 2 (1660–1664), 119.
- 67 *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 4 (1645–1649), 326.
- 68 'En privat vill inthet gärna sin stat låtha publicera', *ibid.*, 9 (1664), 98.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 10 (1668), 502.
- 70 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 4 (1680–1714), 74.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 6 (1723), 27.
- 72 For the Pietist controversy see Ljungberg 2017 and Nordbäck 2004.
- 73 'Sigh stille och rooligen förholle, sin wilfarelse icke utsprijde', Stiernman, vol. 1 (1728), 653.
- 74 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 5 (1719–1720), 391–2.
- 75 *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll*, 11 (1672), 323.
- 76 *Svenska riksdagsakter*, 1. 1, vol. 2. 1 (1561–1574), 437.
- 77 For early modern notions of 'private house', see Ulrik Langen's chapter in this volume.
- 78 *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, 2 (1660–1664), 270–1.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 662 and *ibid.*, 4 (1680–1714), 503.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 5 (1719–1720), 160.
- 81 'Mechta granlaga quaestion', *ibid.*, 7 (1726–1731), 268.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 6 (1723), 509.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 7 (1726–1731), 339.