

# Prostitution as a matter of freedom

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## *Abstract*

Can prostitution be conceived as a voluntary choice? Can the exchange of sexual services in return for money be seen as an act of will? Is it possible to distinguish between voluntary and coerced prostitution? Going through the philosophical debate within the feminist arena, my thesis will analyse the main theoretical standpoints: the radical one, mostly based on gender identity and adversarial logic between sexes; the libertarian one relying on self-ownership and individual freedom; the median one which tries to strike a balance between the two preceding perspectives admitting a certain dose of paternalism. To better understand the polarity within the feminist debate, consider that, while the American feminist Catherine MacKinnon excludes the possibility of voluntary prostitution, waging also a crusade against pornography seen as “an arm of prostitution”<sup>1</sup>, on the other hand the self-described dissident feminist, Camille Paglia, views the prostitute as “one of the few women who is totally in control of her fate, totally in control of the realm of sex”<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, moving from the theoretical to the descriptive dimension, I will describe the main regulatory frameworks existing in some countries, from the most liberal to the strictest one. My thesis is that there is no reason to exclude the possibility of voluntary prostitution, that is the possibility that someone chooses prostitution as a “desirable” activity; and that a neat distinction does exist between voluntary sex working and exploitation, being the latter featured by coercion.

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<sup>1</sup> MacKinnon, C., *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Paglia, C., *Sexual Personae. Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, Vintage, New York, 1991, p. 52.