CHAPTER 3

The Politics of Prudence
Schopenhauer on Self-Governance and Statesmanship

Conversational Strategies

In a note written in 1814, four years before the publication of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer drew a distinction between prudent people and spirited, witty ones, between those who are "*klug*" and those who are "*geistreich*."[1] Prudent individuals consider to *whom* they speak before they think about *what* they say; the identity of the interlocutor determines the content of their conversation. The goal of this prudential approach to social interaction is to cover up weaknesses, avoid solecisms, and minimize regrets. Prudence dictates that speakers should not offend or antagonize others or reveal too much about themselves, for any material they provide might someday be used against them. The attitude of prudent speakers toward their interlocutors is tactical. When one speaks to other people, it is best to be wary and circumspect, without being too obviously guarded, as if the other presents a danger; such a betrayal of a tactical intention would itself not be prudent.

Yet this approach to others, Schopenhauer added in his note, means that conversations with cautious people can never be very interesting. Prudent speakers choose topics carefully for their appropriate blandness and vet opinions so that they do not clash with the assumptions and commitments of others. By contrast, witty people, or people animated by genuine spirit, care more about what they say and less about whom they encounter; their goal is always to say something stimulating, thought-provoking, humorous, or true. Focused in this way on genuinely interesting material, the spirited person can even end up treating the interlocutor as a mere "occasion" for a monologue, a subtle kind of indifference that may come across as a slight.[2] Faced with people who say interesting things but seem not to consider or worry much about the preferences and pieties of the addressees, listeners then become more tactical: they try to see what useful material they might learn about the speaker and scan the unsolicited

monologue for weaknesses and mistakes. In Schopenhauer's note, prudent people are typically too tight-lipped and controlled to be interesting, whereas those who are "rich in spirit" and share their thoughts more freely are naive and overly legible to others.

According to early followers and biographers, Schopenhauer did not belong to the prudent. In a portrait of the philosopher, the early Schopenhauer-promoter Julius Frauenstädt wrote that he was a truly authentic human being. Unlike the "prudent in this world [*Klugen dieser Welt*]," Schopenhauer wore no disguises, showed no calculating behavior, and was drawn to people who were as genuine and open as he was.[3] In Schopenhauer's company, Frauenstädt continued, one had the pleasant feeling of dealing with a sincere lover of truth. Schopenhauer's great affection for dogs had to do with their complete inability to conceal anything; my dog, Frauenstädt reported Schopenhauer saying, is as transparent as glass.[4] Yet the discerning disciple also admitted that Schopenhauer was unable to hide his flaws behind a well-chosen mask. His naivete was that of a child's,[5] and he lacked the composure and cold-bloodedness required to succeed in conflicts or, better, avoid them altogether.[6] Unable to control expressions of his temperament, his behavior lacked the sobriety of someone in full possession of himself. Schopenhauer would not infrequently act and speak rashly and harshly, with severe consequences for himself.[7] Frauenstädt's rival biographer, Wilhelm Gwinner, concurred and wrote that Schopenhauer was unable to adhere to the maxim *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* (pleasantly in manner, powerfully in deed).[8] Bluntly put, he was just not a pleasant person. And as his biography shows, Schopenhauer embroiled himself in long-term conflicts, alienated others, and spent his adulthood unsupported by professional and friendship networks. He was unable to contain his impulses, maintain an unruffled exterior, and adapt to others rather than provoke and anger them.

Schopenhauer developed a full account of the skill he himself so obviously lacked: he articulated a philosophy of prudent behavior. Over the decades, he returned again and again to the human ability to prevent information leakage in social settings, and the complementary skill of subtly eliciting information about others. For him, prudence was even the supreme political ability. The twin skills of interpreting others and then adjusting to them, of reading others and restraining oneself, were needed to navigate the difficult world of interpersonal relationships. Some enhanced version of prudence, he even claimed, is a key attribute of statesmen whose aspirations and achievements shape the course of history. People equipped with prudence, Schopenhauer believed, could more easily achieve their goals and defend their material and reputational advantages

in volatile settings where they found themselves surrounded by opaque, unpredictable, and treacherous others, who similarly looked out for themselves. Prudent players, whether active in limited and local settings or on a grand, world-historical stage, were in his view able to pursue their aims, large and small, by understanding and mobilizing others as instruments toward the realization of their own projects. In fact, Schopenhauer coordinated his account of centralized statehood as an indispensable instrument of society-wide pacification with an account of disciplined self-governance as an obligation for the political subject. For this reason, an exploration of the character and place of prudence in his works uncovers the true extent of his political thought, which has so far gone unnoticed.

The Place of Prudence in Schopenhauer's Philosophy

Schopenhauer's analysis of prudence complements his vision of state politics. He viewed the world as a place of never-ending collisions among fragmented particles of the metaphysical will. In plain language, he saw most human beings as aggressive egoists. The proper response to the latent war of all is the centralization of the means of coercion in the state. Only a state can hope to manage the symptoms of near-universal egoism, although it cannot cure the underlying problem, namely, the fragmentation of the unitary will in the domain of representation. Yet not all egoists, Schopenhauer thought, are alike, and some do better than others. *Prudent* egoists, he argued, are more likely to succeed in their self-interested pursuits, better able to achieve any results, however fragile and temporary, because of their facility in dealing with other egoists. Psychological acuity and self-control enable prudent agents to govern themselves with a view to governing others, and, in this way, they can achieve some satisfaction in a hostile world. The key political institution for Schopenhauer was the state, but prudence was his preferred name for politically apt patterns of action because, like statecraft, prudence involves the manipulation and coordination of inescapably egoistic individuals. For him, statecraft and prudentially guided behavior even represented complementary ways of managing the disruptive symptoms of a will fractured into millions of self-seeking individuals. Schopenhauer's 1814 definition of prudence as the art of conversational self-management may seem suggestive but inconsequential, but an analysis of his entire work reveals its connection with his more elaborate reflections on political maneuvering, and even with a philosophical conception of political leadership and state policy.

Judging by the secondary literature, Schopenhauer is not known for his treatment of prudence. He is famous for his unsparing analysis of the vanity and pain of existence, and the perennial suffering of individuals in a world of constant strife and impossible satisfaction. He is likewise famous for his discussions of ways in which human beings can transcend the world of suffering by means of the blessings of aesthetic perception, by moral awareness of the suffering of others, or by will-denying, "self-overcoming" asceticism.[9] Scholars have sometimes covered his reflections on Stoicism,[10] although the ancient practice of using reason to immunize oneself to the painful vagaries of life and thereby achieve tranquility does not rank as highly for Schopenhauer as aesthetic experience, compassion, or rigorous asceticism. In *The World as Will and Representation*, he unfavorably compared the Stoic to the more awe-inspiring figures of the Christian savior or the Indian ascetic and called the former a "stiff and wooden . . . mannequin" (WWR I: 118). The Stoics were people who turned themselves into puppets of their rational faculties. Schopenhauer did write an entire popular tract on life wisdom, which, while not entirely Stoic, nonetheless advises readers to find peace in themselves through the careful management of expectations, partial withdrawal from others, and a moderate and circumscribed lifestyle. Yet in producing this collection of wise maxims, Schopenhauer was self-consciously inconsistent; he noted in the introduction to the aphorisms that their premises contradicted the central tenets of his philosophy. Schopenhauer acknowledged that, properly understood, the philosophy articulated in *The World as Will and Representation* undermined the very possibility of a life project oriented toward an untroubled, satisfying existence. The late book was explicitly an "accommodation" to a non-philosophical viewpoint and to an established tradition of wisdom, not a deepening of his own philosophy (PP I: 273).

In comparison, Schopenhauer's construal of prudence has attracted much less attention. It is not hard to see why; he did not exactly embrace or endorse a prudent approach to existence. His works present the suffering of existence and discuss modes of living that offer an escape from the will, but prudence as a life strategy clearly falls outside the range of commendable attitudes and behaviors. The prudent individual does not contemplate ideal forms (as in aesthetic experience) but energetically acts in this world out of self-interest. Prudence also does not involve compassion with others to the point of merging with them; instead, prudent people approach others as potential enemies and seek to use them for their own ends. Finally, and most obviously, prudent agents strive for a focused and effective exercise of the will rather than its denial.

In Schopenhauer's universe, such a strategy must ultimately perpetuate suffering for oneself and others rather than reduce it or overcome it altogether. In the hierarchy of solutions (and nonsolutions) to the problem of inevitable agony, the attempts of prudent agents to succeed in the world must rank lower even than Stoic practices, which similarly aim for human happiness but then in the form of *ataraxia*, a calmness of the soul beyond both "jubilation" and "pain" (WWR I: 115). As mentioned earlier, Schopenhauer only partially and hesitantly endorsed the "spiritual dietetics" of Stoicism (WWR II: 168). Focused as they are on actual success in the world, the strategies of prudence could not expect more enthusiastic support.

The prudent individual views the world as an arena in which advantage and satisfaction are well worth pursuing. A prudence-based life program is thus more aggressive than Stoicism and the contentment-oriented practices of traditional life wisdom because prudent individuals seek to achieve their own personal ends by steering and manipulating other egoists. Rather than withdrawing from the tumult of the world into an inner citadel of the "steadfast soul"[11] to achieve a "joyful tranquility,"[12] prudence engages the world. Given that willing has no final destination, that frustration and pain are ineluctable, and that states of joy and comfort prove to be either elusive or pitifully brief, prudential action must fail to secure any lasting happiness. All prudence, Schopenhauer wrote in his 1816 notes, "walks on shaky, undermined ground [*untergrabenem Boden*]."[13] The desire to thrive in the field of ceaseless human competition and antagonism, rather than retreat from it, is condemned to futility. The prudent individual cannot hope for an enduringly satisfying existence, let alone a triumphant one, and likely contributes to suffering. Schopenhauer is mercilessly clear on this in his late reflections titled "Nothingness and Suffering of Life":

> Everything that we set about puts up opposition, because it has a will of its own that must be overcome. Two remedies are tried for this: first *eulabeia*, i.e. prudence, foresight, cunning: this is something that we cannot master and it is insufficient, amounting to nothing. Second, Stoic equanimity, which wants to disarm every misfortune by being prepared for and contemptuous of everything: in practice it becomes cynical renunciation. (WWR II: 592–3)

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer even disputed that a happy individual life won by shrewdness can ever be truly profound and lasting when surrounded by endemic suffering. Some people may enjoy a "happy life in time" through the "effect of prudence," but it is only

the *principium individuationis* that separates them from the pain felt by others, and since empirical separateness is ultimately an illusion, they are just "a beggar dreaming he is king" (WWR I: 380). The prudent individual may be satisfied in isolation, but the condition is inauthentic, surrounded everywhere by misery, and protected from this misery only by the pathetic illusion of individuality.

Yet the necessary failure of prudence does not mean that it is nonexistent or eludes philosophical treatment. In Schopenhauer's view, prudence constitutes a distinct ability, even a coherent approach to life, and deserves sustained and serious treatment. To asceticism, compassion, aesthetic experience, and Stoic equanimity, we can thus add prudence as a flawed but distinctive method to counter the challenges of human life. Schopenhauer's exemplary figures, which include the holy person, the saint, and the Stoic, are joined by the canny tactician, the politician, and even the statesman – the incarnations of prudence.

The main piece of evidence for the significance that Schopenhauer granted prudence is an entire book of his devoted to the topic, albeit a translation rather than one of his original works. In the early 1830s, in the middle of a long period of silence or nonpublication, Schopenhauer translated the neo-Stoic Jesuit[14] Baltasar Gracián's (1601–58) *The Pocket Oracle and the Art of Prudence* [*Orácula manual y arte de prudencia*] (1647). Gracián's work was not unknown in the German tradition. The baroque dramatist Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635–83) had translated a work by Gracián and knew the book on prudence. Christian Thomasius (1635–1728), a jurist and philosopher who pioneered the Leipzig-based early German Enlightenment, also drew on Gracián's work to develop a concept of politically useful knowledge in contradistinction to learned pedantry.[15] Yet Schopenhauer's engagement with the Spanish Golden Age writer Gracián represented a rediscovery after a period of German nonengagement. Schopenhauer himself claimed that his was the first German translation from the original Spanish since 1717, and the first truly faithful one ever;[16] he himself owned a 1702 Spanish edition of Gracián's complete works.[17]

Schopenhauer's rediscovery was only partially a public affair. His published works did feature many references to Gracián, and the philosopher Hans Blumenberg credits him with introducing the novel *El Criticón* (1651–7) to a German public in his diatribes against Hegel and Fichte.[18] According to Schopenhauer, Gracián showed how easily people are fooled but also how their fear of social repercussions causes them to accept the dominant nonsense rather than speak the truth as dissidents[19] – this could,

he felt, explain the public celebration of charlatans such as Hegel. Schopenhauer's complete translation of Gracián's work on prudence, however, did not appear during his lifetime. It was published in 1862, a couple of years after his death, with the title *Hand-Orakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit*.[20]

The sheer labor of turning Gracián's text into German indicates that Schopenhauer admired the Spanish author's counsels, which had been sharpened during years of service to the church and at court,[21] settings in which men competed ceaselessly for benefits, favor, and patronage.[22] In a note written to a contact in Leipzig's publishing circles, Schopenhauer claimed that Gracián's *Art of Prudence* would serve as a good "handbook" to everyone who sought to "make their fortune in the wide world," especially young and inexperienced people.[23] We can safely assume that Schopenhauer appreciated maxims such as "Make people depend on you";[24] "Avoid outdoing your superior";[25] "Don't arouse excessive expectations from the start";[26] "Find everyone's weak spot";[27] "Recognize and know how to use insinuations";[28] "Be in people's good graces";[29] and of course: "Never lose your composure"[30] and "Talk circumspectly."[31] From an elevated philosophical viewpoint available to Schopenhauer himself, the strategies of prudence were doomed to fail; no lasting security and happiness could ever be attained in a fundamentally defective universe. From a metaphysical perspective, it was ultimately quite pointless to seek to make one's fortune in the world. Yet from the pragmatic viewpoint of those who struggle through an unforgiving sociopolitical world of cutthroat competition and constant intrigue, the art of prudence was, Schopenhauer believed, still eminently useful. Gracián's collection of maxims could even be, Schopenhauer felt, a "companion for life."[32]

In Gracián's aphoristic counsels on wary speech, we can, finally, recognize the young Schopenhauer's distinction between the spirited but naive conversational partner, on the one hand, and the intentionally bland-seeming tactician, on the other. Yet in the work of the Spanish teacher of prudence, the contrast appears in a slightly different light, as a difference between the appropriately reticent person and the recklessly garrulous one: "*A person who is cautious is clearly prudent*," Gracián writes, and continues: "The tongue is ferocious; once let loose, it's very difficult to chain it up again."[33] Throughout his life, then, Schopenhauer reflected on the requirements of prudence and on how to shrewdly navigate in a society of self-seeking, duplicitous people. Above all, he believed in Gracián's claim that reticence signaled "true mastery" of oneself.[34] Of course, Schopenhauer himself was too transparent, temperamental, and brusque

to exemplify prudence; he never quite possessed the composure of a smooth courtier or skilled politician.

Schopenhauer on the Elements of Prudence

Often inspired by Gracián, Schopenhauer provided a series of reflections on prudence throughout his work and highlighted its various aspects under different headings in his philosophical system. Yet his conception of prudence was not incoherent, and his various treatments fit together in a consistent characterization. His conception of the elements of prudence can be clarified in four steps. First, prudence is oriented toward the satisfaction of the will through the attainment of worldly success. Second, the efficient attainment of such success is based on grasping the most adequate and efficient arrangement of means and resources at one's disposal. Third, the prudential deployment of suitable means toward the will's aims crucially depends on the perspicacious cognition and prediction of patterns in human behavior; since human beings must pursue almost all their significant goals in interpersonal settings,[35] prudent behavior requires understanding others. Fourth, prudence involves finely calibrated responses to the expectations and actions of others and, especially, the ability to conceal one's real aims and desires. In sum, prudence presupposes that agents attain their goals and make their fortune in the world by recognizing, adapting to, and exploiting the motivations of others, all the while hiding their own.

Each of these four elements requires elaboration. To begin with, Schopenhauer understood prudence as focused on worldly success. Religions, he pointed out in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, typically promise rewards such as an eternal life for humans who are pious, compassionate, and selfless. Religious institutions celebrate and cultivate moral virtues, understood as essential elements of human character, and seek to gear the human will toward the blessings of an otherworldly realm. Yet many of the will's ends are firmly secular – human agents obviously seek to "make their fortune" in the world, whether that involves attaining security, material comfort, adulation, or perhaps sheer power. The key to these forms of success, Schopenhauer continued, is prudence: "Virtue expects its reward in the other world, prudence hopes for it in this" (WWR II: 243). For him, prudence was an attitude that stood outside a strictly religious or at least Christian conception of virtuous conduct.[36] The prudential agent wants to perceive the world as it is and achieve aims that lie in the here and now. Whereas post-Machiavellian

political thinkers eager to save politics from immorality have often argued that virtue and prudence are mutually dependent on and presuppose one another, so that prudent advice is never unconstrained by ethical concerns,[37] Schopenhauer preferred to separate transcendent and worldly aims, religious and political attitudes. He clearly distinguished between virtue and prudence; for him, prudence was an extra-ethical ability geared toward secular success and nothing more.

Second, Schopenhauer construed prudence as a competency, a near-technical ability. The conception of prudence as a circumscribed, separable skill is in line with his broadly instrumental understanding of intelligence. In his extensive discussion of the primacy of willing in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer called the intellect a "mere tool" in service of the will (WWR II: 243). The will makes us who we are or constitutes our "inner and ownmost kernel" (WWR II: 243), whereas the intellect is often seen as a "gift" of nature, almost an extraneous addition or resource that is "different from the person himself" (WWR II: 243). It is against the backdrop of this distinction between the originary will and the subservient intellect that Schopenhauer introduced prudence, or "worldly wisdom [*Lebensklugheit*]," as the ability to choose the optimal means for the realization of a goal, but also, more fundamentally, as the name for the appropriateness or adequacy of a particular goal to one's "true will" (WWR I: 322).[38] Prudence itself does not generate desires, wishes, and aims – all of these are rooted in the generative will. Instead, prudence designates the intellectual ability to identify appropriate means with respect to defined goals and, more fundamentally, to assess appropriate goals with respect to one's character as a crystallization of will.

For Schopenhauer, the intellect is a tool of the will, a human capacity that guides and facilitates the will's satisfaction, and prudence is the designation of the intellect's discernment of the most adequate and efficient means toward worldly satisfaction. If he nonetheless did not declare the complete identity of human intelligence and prudence, it is because the intellect can exceed mere prudential use. At least in exceptional individuals, the intellect can emancipate itself from mere "*servitude to the will*" and thus exercise itself non-prudentially, in pure contemplation (WWR II: 394). In fact, the person whose intellect has "broken free" from the will is none other than the genius (WWR II: 399). By contrast, prudence is the intellect manifest in a focused executive mode, geared toward the efficient realization of (worldly) goals ultimately determined by the will. In the prudent person as opposed to the genius, "solid chains" bind cognition to willing (WWR II: 397).

Third, prudence centrally involves understanding and forecasting human behavior. To fulfil its instrumental function in the attainment of tangible, worldly success, prudence is concerned with discerning human motivations. In the first book of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer pointed out how prudence denotes a distinct practical use of intelligence. Understanding always consists in the alert grasp of "causal relations among objects" of perception (WWR I: 43). This ability serves as the foundation of the natural sciences, which, with the help of abstract reasoning, move from observations of events in nature to the formulation of natural laws. Yet there is also the perception of causality in the practical sense, or "*cleverness* [*Klugheit*]" (WWR I: 43).[39] The focus of this practically oriented perceptiveness is not the causal relations among objects, but rather the actions of human beings as they respond to motives. Schopenhauer insisted that these two forms of understanding are parallel. The theoretical understanding allows individuals to grasp the laws that govern occurrences in the natural world and to apply the knowledge of cause and effect in the construction of complicated machinery. The practical understanding, by contrast, helps savvy individuals to see through and anticipate motivated human behavior and even to set other human beings "in motion like the levers and cogs of machines" for the realization of some end (WWR I: 44). The twin forms of understanding contrast sharply with stupidity. In the realm of theory, stupid people fail to understand why anything happens. Confused and overwhelmed, they turn to a belief in magic and wonder. In the parallel realm of practice, stupid people fail to notice why others act the way they do, and they gullibly believe the lies and false advice of others. Due to this obtuseness, they become easy targets of intrigues and machinations. In short, they lack prudence. In this discussion, prudence again emerges as cognitive acumen in the service of the will tied to the manipulation of other human beings. Once one understands the needs, desires, and wishes of others, one can more easily nudge and lead them.

Finally, prudence involves control over the self's own expressions. People who are focused on understanding, predicting, and steering the actions of others must learn to conceal their own affects and intentions and carefully guard their behavior. The successful manipulation of others presupposes sovereign control over one's own self; the mastery of others depends on self-mastery.[40] In his tract on morality, Schopenhauer noted that it is a grave tactical error to divulge one's aversion and animosity toward others. Open expressions of dislike betray the awkward truth of "universal mutual ill-will" (BM: 192), and displays of egoism can even

cause unnecessary enmities to flare up, which would sabotage the projects of the prudent agent. To avoid trouble, "prudence and politeness" must "cast their cloak" over manifestations of ill-will (BM: 192). With a characteristically blunt phrase, Schopenhauer even claimed that we should "conceal our will just as we do our genitals" (PP II: 537); exposing either would be vulgar. Even when faced with explicit expressions of aversion and enmity, the prudent person should respond with impregnable neutrality. It is necessary, Schopenhauer noted, "to perceive the hateful attitude of others" without feeling one's own affects "stimulated in turn" (PP II: 536). Christian and Hindu ascetics similarly do not react violently to provocations and show "unlimited patience with all insults," but then they do so from a state of deep renunciation, not as a matter of strategic calculation (WWR I: 415).

In this context, Schopenhauer predictably turned to Gracián, his main authority on dignified and circumspect demeanor, to argue that the serious man takes care not to betray his will. At times, Schopenhauer even directly quoted Gracián's counsels on controlled self-presentation: "Nothing does a human being's reputation more ill," Gracián declared, "than to let on that he is a human being" (PP II: 537). Concerned with different forms of concealment, Schopenhauer also hypothesized that men grow beards to escape "the prying gaze" of adversaries, since the "rapid change of facial features that betrays inner changes of mood" is "visible mostly in the mouth and its surrounding area and this pathognomy is often dangerous in negotiations" (WWR II: 349). Nature, he added, "knows that man is a wolf to man," and beards are meant as aids to prudence in the constant battle of life (WWR II: 349). Since beards are veritable "semi-masks," the police in some states are even "authorized to prohibit" them (PP I: 158); regimes typically want more transparent, more easily legible subjects for easier control. (In the curious case of facial hair, then, state interest and individual interest may pull in different directions.)

Drawing on Gracián but also the French moralists François de La Rouchefoucauld (1613–80) and Jean de La Bruyère (1645–96), Schopenhauer viewed politeness as a key strategy of the prudent man of the world.[41] As he declared in his own aphorisms on life wisdom: "Politeness is prudence" (PP I: 406). The attempt to avoid offending others may not be a strong moral priority,[42] but it is certainly a tactical imperative: a person who makes constant enemies through rude and ungracious manners, Schopenhauer thought, is acting as rashly as someone who sets his "house on fire" (PP I: 406). For a philosopher as obsessively preoccupied with differences in intellectual ability as Schopenhauer, the

polite communication of respect[43] for the dignity and worth of others was a "difficult task": "the majority," he felt, "do not deserve it" (PP I: 406). For this reason, he could not see politeness as anything but a "grinning mask" (PP I: 407). Yet he understood polite behavior as a prudential necessity because insights into exploitable patterns of human behavior are useless unless supplemented by careful self-discipline in the form of urbane civility; politely signaling a basic level of respect for others is the precondition for influencing and guiding them. Schopenhauer even suggested that politeness is to humans what warmth is to wax: it renders even stiffly hostile people more "pliable and accommodating" (PP I: 406).

As the connected points above make clear, Schopenhauer approached prudence in different contexts and from different angles, but still developed a coherent image of its function in human life and its place in his philosophical architecture. He characterized prudence as an intellectual competency that serves the satisfaction of the will through the efficient pursuit of worldly, extra-moral goals. Since those worldly aims must be achieved among other individuals and require their suitable arrangement as "cogs and levers," the primary facets of prudence are the discernment of human motivation and the curation of one's own social being. Prudence involves reading the motivations and attitudes of others and hiding one's own; deciphering others and enciphering oneself.[44]

Schopenhauer's conception of prudence is broadly consonant with that of other thinkers whom he read and knew well. Kant, for example, provided a definition of prudence. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant introduced prudence as the informed choice of means for the attainment of well-being.[45] Schopenhauer would not have disagreed. In a footnote, Kant also distinguished between two kinds of prudence: worldly prudence (*Weltklugheit*) and private prudence (*Privatklugheit*). The former designates "the skill of a human being to influence others so as to use them for his purpose," whereas the latter refers to the ability to "unite all these purposes to his own enduring advantage" and thus to achieve the greatest possible long-term satisfaction.[46] The person who possesses the skill to steer others but does not have a clear vision of what is to be accomplished, Kant then added, will come across as crafty but still imprudent. Prudence is, Kant argued, an art of happiness,[47] and it implies a life goal or rather a comprehensive and sustained life project; it is not a narrowly technical competency divorced from a concern for well-being.[48] Yet this well-being must be pursued in the challenging field of interpersonal relationships through attempts to guide and govern others[49] – this is the essence of *Weltklugheit*.

Schopenhauer, however, did not cite Kant's fundamental definitions or the conceptual groundwork of any other thinker. His main authority on prudence was, again, Gracián, who appears quite frequently in Schopenhauer's later works, written after he completed his unpublished translation. When he turned to Gracián, however, Schopenhauer mostly referred to specific counsels on carefully managed behavior that were drawn from the *Pocket Oracle's* "three hundred ... rules of wisdom [*Klugheitsregeln*]" (WWR II: 81).[50] For instance, he cited Gracián's advice that those who want to be liked must conceal their mental superiority and "put on the skin of the most stupid animal,"[51] and that it is best for those with exceptional gifts to aim for concision ("the good, when brief, is doubly good," PP II, 426).[52] He also referred to Gracián's counsel that human beings should avoid all frivolity, maintain their aura of gravity, and never give the impression that they are nothing more than vulnerable, ordinary men.[53] When writing of prudence, then, Schopenhauer preferred to formulate his own basic definitions and distinctions, but often gave texture to the art of prudence through quotations from Gracián, the champion of dignified reticence. For Schopenhauer as for Kant, prudence generally meant the ability to pursue satisfaction in this world through the careful selection of appropriate means, but when it came to speaking about prudence in practice, Schopenhauer most frequently wrote about the skill of keeping up a façade in interactions with others. Leaning on Gracián, Schopenhauer saw prudence as synonymous with shrewd cautiousness and reserve.

The Paragon of Prudence: Schopenhauer's Statesman

In Schopenhauer's works, prudence emerges as the pursuit of worldly aims by means of the ability to understand and exploit human motivation. Prudence strives not to quiet the will through rigorous self-denial (asceticism) but to guide the will to a successful achievement of the will's aims. It does not break free from narrow-minded egoism (compassion) but seeks to satisfy the ego. It does not conduct rational self-talk that aims to temper the investment in worldly success and maintain tranquility in the face of volatile circumstances (Stoicism), but actively engages the world, albeit in an attentively tactical, circumspect manner.

This characterization of prudence suggests that it is a tool for individuals acting in local, interpersonal settings, which of course it is. Yet in a series of reflections in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* and *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer repeatedly wrote of

prudence as the premier skill of the politician or statesman. Through a series of contrasts with another and more highly valued figure, the genius, Schopenhauer even drew a portrait of the man of "world affairs," able to size up complex, multifactorial situations of historical import, anticipate likely developments, and chart a course of action for a political collective, a "mass of humanity" (WWR II: 232). Fleshing out the various ways in which the intellect can serve the will, Schopenhauer arrived at something like a rudimentary anthropology of political ability.

Schopenhauer's definition of the famous and successful politician – the statesman – is relatively simple. The statesman is the individual who possesses a great deal of intelligence, but whose intelligence nonetheless remains in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the will and functions as its tool. Statesmen throw themselves into political battles, steadily pursue their aims, and are aided in their grandiose efforts by a high degree of intelligence that allows them to seize opportunities and dominate their surroundings. In contrast, the genius emerges only through the release of the intelligence from subordination to the will. The statesman and the genius, the eminence in politics and the eminence in thought and in art, thus represent parallel figures, positioned on either side of a threshold. The statesman's intelligence remains bound in service to the will and seeks to achieve its aims, whereas the genius' intelligence outstrips the will and begins to operate autonomously, without a limiting focus on any material goal, free from the primary drive to solidify the position of the ego. This makes the genius maximally receptive to the objective world but also completely incompetent in practical matters: "Genius is as useful in practical life," Schopenhauer wrote, "as an astronomical telescope is in the theatre" (WWR II: 155). Schopenhauer did not support the Platonic ideal of the philosopher king; according to him, the true genius will pull away from the world rather than intervene in it and should not assume political responsibilities.[54] Deep insight into the very constitution of the universe cannot function as a preparation for rule.

The contrast between the statesman and the genius appears in Schopenhauer's long reflections on the primacy of the will in human self-consciousness. The man of "world affairs" shows up in a discussion of the roots of indecision, which Schopenhauer understood as a fatal flaw in the arena of politics. Very limited minds, he first established, are not prone to indecision: they are not capable of a sufficient degree of reflection to think before they act or be deterred by potential consequences, and their much-reduced intelligence does not hamper their will. People with a greater degree of understanding, however, can easily begin to worry about

the outcomes of their actions and become paralyzed: their egoism leads them to seek advantages for themselves, but their awareness of downsides and dangers holds them back from doing anything. Finally, Schopenhauer introduced a third group, people who neither act foolishly nor are afraid to act. These are the highly sophisticated minds whose intelligence allows them to survey a complicated set of circumstances and determine "probable developments," but then also to act with "swift decisiveness and firmness" (WWR II: 232). Great politicians, Schopenhauer believed, combine a formidable intelligence, which helps them to weigh factors and forecast likely outcomes, with a formidable will, which propels them forward and leads them to take decisive actions. They act but they do not act stupidly. At the same time, the understanding that they do possess never overwhelms or undermines their decisiveness. This combination of the mind's "speed and assurance" with the will's "firmness, decisiveness and perseverance" gives them a chance to emerge as "historic characters" capable of guiding large collectives (WWR II: 232).

Although he was admiring of the statesman's combination of a determined will and a supple intellect, Schopenhauer did not consider the virtuoso of worldly affairs the apex of humanity. For him, geniuses stood above politicians. Yet the genius only appears when the smooth combination of will and intellect breaks down under an "abnormally preponderant development of intellect" (WWR II: 232). In Schopenhauer's cognitively oriented definition of genius,[55] its greatness consists in the ability to look at the world without being compelled by the will, that is, to contemplate the universe with complete lack of self-interest and therefore with absolute lucidity and objectivity. Yet transcendence of the will by intelligence in genius can be a hindrance to energy of character and to "power of action" (WWR I: 232). Geniuses, Schopenhauer thus concluded, would make bad politicians and even live "halfway outside of social life."[56] Statesmen are by their constitution barred from entrance to the exclusive realm of genius, and geniuses perform poorly in the most demanding of human environments, the arena of world-historically significant politics. They are affiliated figures thanks to their transcendent abilities but embody different configurations of will and intellect.

Unsurprisingly, Schopenhauer associated the intellect of the statesman with prudence, his label for intelligence in the service of the will. Already in the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer posited a contrast between prudence and genius. Prudence, he wrote in a section of the book on the Platonic idea and the object of art, consists in the sharp discernment of causal relationships in the realm of nature and of

motivations in the realm of human psychology. Prudent or shrewd people possess a "firm grasp of relations in accordance with the laws of causality and motivation" (WWR I: 213). This sure appreciation of the world around them is what allows them to prognosticate developments, anticipate reactions, and manipulate the natural and human environment for their own gain. The genius is likewise defined by extraordinary perspicacity, but not one directed at "relations," the ceaseless, complex interactions of multiple particulars (WWR I: 213). Instead, the genius contemplates the things in themselves, or rather, the ideas. No longer driven by impulses to intervene in the world to satisfy self-interest, the genius is capable of a serene, purified kind of perception, which delights in universal forms rather than tracks the fate of any particulars.[57] As a result, a "shrewd [*Kluger*] person, in so far as and at the time he is being shrewd [*klug*], will not be a genius, and a genius . . . will not be shrewd [*klug*]" (WWR I: 213).[58]

In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, finally, the contrast between prudence and pure intellectual brilliance aligns with the contrast between the statesman and the genius. In his reflections on the nature of the intellect, Schopenhauer argued that an exceptional receptivity to universal forms, a characteristic of the true genius, can impede engagement with the world, because states of pure contemplation do not allow for resolute actions. Again, geniuses lack the worldly attentiveness and the energy of great politicians, whose judgments of situations are grounded in a swift cognitive grasp of unfolding relations and whose characteristic "boldness and tenacity" is grounded in the strong will (PP II: 68). Correspondingly, politicians cannot be called geniuses, and their ability to assess circumstances and lead people is best labeled "cleverness" or "cunning" (PP II: 68). Actors on the world-historical stage such as statesmen and generals are intellectually superior to other human beings whom they dominate and direct, but they still possess an inferior type of superiority, namely, prudence, which cannot compare to authentic genius. Men of great deeds, as Schopenhauer called them in his 1831 notes, are amazingly accomplished people and yet differ from "all others" by degree rather than kind. Only geniuses or "men of great works" truly belong in a category of their own.[59] The inferiority of great political and military figures to great thinkers consists in the fact that their prudence still serves at the pleasure of the will, however much it fulfils this service with great "precision and ease" (PP II: 69). Genius materializes only when the intellect declines its service to the will, looks beyond the "particular,"[60] turns off its close attention to human motivation, and thus sheds its appearance as political

savvy to emerge purified as perfect contemplation. In the person of the genius, the intellect no longer functions as a tool.

The contrast between the eminently prudent mind and the genius appears again and again in Schopenhauer's works. When discussing the greatness and pathology of genius, Schopenhauer more than once turned to Goethe's play *Torquato Tasso*, published in 1790, which portrays an exceptionally gifted but profoundly melancholy poet. To Schopenhauer, Goethe's drama illustrated the torments of the true genius, the ability of the transcendent artist to give voice to human suffering ("A god gifted me to speak of how I suffer," WWR II: 572), but also the inspired artist's tendency to descend into "madness" (WWR II: 405). Goethe's play, Schopenhauer concluded, shows that the laurel crown given to the genius is "more a sign of sorrow than of luck," a symbol of martyrdom rather than of triumph (PP II: 69). *Tasso* was for Schopenhauer the affecting drama of genius.[61]

Yet Schopenhauer also claimed that the play staged a "vivid portrayal of the contrast" between the socially inept poet, Torquato Tasso, and the "man of action" or incarnation of prudence, the skilled courtier and diplomat Antonio (WWR II: 405). In Goethe's play, Tasso is completing an epic poem that will earn him great fame, but his volatile temperament and lack of sobriety cause him to violate the courtly decorum embodied and upheld by Antonio.[62] Tasso does not possess, as Goethe has a character say, prudent mastery over his expressions of affect: "[t]he prudent rule over tongue and lip [*Die kluge Herrschaft über Zung und Lippe*]."[63] The difference between him and Antonio, Tasso himself acknowledges, is that Antonio excels in the art at which he fails, namely, calculated self-discipline and elegant adherence to convention – "he is prudent, and, regrettably! I am not [*er ist klug, und leider! bin ichs nicht*]."[64] Goethe's portrayal of the dangers of artistic talent is also a drama about prudent conduct understood as cunning manipulation and dignified restraint. Tasso is the poet of sublime expressiveness, but Antonio always pays heed to whom and where he speaks, a principle of prudence. *Torquato Tasso* was, after *Faust*, the Goethe play that Schopenhauer cited most frequently.[65]

As in Goethe's work on the tension between genius and prudence, Schopenhauer's hero of great "*deeds*" (the statesman) serves as a persistent foil for the portrait of the hero of great literary or philosophical "*works*" (the genius) (WWR II: 404). The former is a heightened version of the average person, whereas the latter is a truly exceptional phenomenon. Yet Schopenhauer's repeated comments on the abilities required for political maneuvering and action in world affairs – "use of cognition, presence of

mind, and decisiveness" (WWR II: 404) – still complicates the standard picture of him as an utterly apolitical philosopher. Rather than ignore politics, Schopenhauer understood successful politicians and military leaders as key figures in a taxonomy of types meant to elucidate the interplay of human faculties. In the repeated discussions of contrasting capacities and qualities (action vs. contemplation, practically oriented cunning vs. aloof naivete, the focus on the particular vs. the focus on the universal), the prudent leader embodies the most impressive combination of volitional strength and cognitive alertness. You cannot succeed in the hyper-competitive domain of political struggles, Schopenhauer claimed, without a forceful and steadfast will supported by a great intellect. Politics even represented for Schopenhauer the "highest arena where talent asserts itself" in the realm of practical activity (PP II: 68). Of course, Schopenhauer believed that there is a mode of human existence even more elevated than politics, but that is one that lies beyond the domain of practical activity, one that emerges only when the intellect separates from the will. Genius is pure, autonomous intellect, and the rest is prudence.

Prudence of the State

According to Schopenhauer, prudence is of use in everyday conversations and on the world-historical stage; it is the skill of the careful interlocutor and the key resource of the great statesman. As the intellectual instrument of the perpetually striving will, prudence appears across several contexts and even connects the local and the grandiose. When Schopenhauer dispensed prudent advice, he sometimes thought of the individual who makes advantageous choices in interpersonal encounters and sometimes of the consequential measures of an experienced statesman. He counseled people to conceal their anger and preserve the façade of indifference in order to avoid being pulled into or aggravating interpersonal conflicts: "prudence and culture will instruct us to keep up appearances" (PP I: 336). Yet, in line with a seventeenth-century conception of parallel modes of *Privatklugheit* and *Staatsklugheit*,[66] Schopenhauer also directed prudent recommendations to governments. In *The World as Will and Representation,* he claimed that it is a matter of "political prudence" for regimes to organize entertainments and festivals, since mass boredom might drive people into "licentiousness" and lead to disorder and chaos (WWR I: 340). There are prudent measures that a state can take to pacify a society internally and reduce potential violent struggles down to petty quarrels, although it can never fully eliminate conflicts.

Schopenhauer evidently assumed that prudence, understood as instrumental rationality, is a concept with wide applicability, equally relevant in discussions of individual behavior and of state conduct. This also becomes apparent in his references to his favorite political philosophers. In the chapter on politics in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer introduced Machiavelli as a theorist of princely power who wrote about the conquest and rule over peoples and territories. Yet after an aside about La Rouchefoucauld's 1665 collection of observations about "private life," as opposed to the public or political realm, Schopenhauer returned to Machiavelli and added that "there is much that applies to private life" in his writings on the establishment and maintenance of principalities (PP II: 225). Schopenhauer of course relied more on Gracián than Machiavelli, but they were parallel figures. Both encouraged vigilant self-protection and contextually sensitive acumen in treacherous environments, but Gracián transferred Machiavelli's principle of the supreme priority of the state's integrity and security to the integrity and security of the individual person.[67] Broadly speaking, Schopenhauer stood for a Machiavellian approach to politics in that he understood it as requiring situational judgments and actions dictated by opportunities for success in changing circumstances rather than steadfast moral virtue. As the political theorist Sheldon Wolin has pointed out, pre-Machiavellian thinkers often judged prudence to imply a "character which reacted too glibly to changing conditions" without an "habitual disposition toward the good."[68] For this reason, prudence was unworthy of a place among the "supreme virtues."[69] Schopenhauer had no such qualms about the role of prudence in politics. He sharply separated the domains of morality and politics, genuine compassion and calculated self-interest, and singled out prudence as the political ability par excellence.

Schopenhauer also invoked Hobbes as a great theorist of statehood whose ideas were nonetheless applicable to the strategies of individuals. In the case of Hobbes, Schopenhauer himself did the work of translating recommendations meant for the commonwealth to the domain of private pursuits. In Hobbes' doctrine of right, Schopenhauer stated, everyone originally has the right to everything and hence nobody enjoys any exclusive rights. Such exclusive rights are established when everyone agrees to claim entitlements to a few things while simultaneously renouncing their rights to everything else. Secure ownership comes about through the coordinated establishment of mutual exclusivity. "This is," Schopenhauer then continued with a leap into analogy, "exactly how it is in life" (WWR I: 330): an individual can only seriously pursue one project and must

accept giving up all others – the choice of one goal such as honor or artistic achievement will typically exclude the sustained pursuit of another.

For Schopenhauer, then, Machiavelli's and Hobbes' teachings were applicable to states as well as to individuals. More broadly, the conduct of the self and the conduct of the state, individual life and social life, represented related fields of operation for prudent calculation and goal-oriented action. Schopenhauer implied, then, that principles of prudence can serve the need for conflict management across different scales. It is prudent for the individual to avoid expressions of anger that provoke acrimony in others, and prudent for the state to avoid a muted, colorless public life that can lead to restlessness among the crowds.

The Government of the Self

The parallels between personal prudence and state prudence in Schopenhauer's writings ultimately suggest that his conception of the scope of politics is wider than traditionally assumed. In most of the secondary literature, Schopenhauer's politics appears neatly circumscribed. Scholars have typically assumed that his conception of politics appears in the rather brief sections explicitly devoted to jurisprudence and the state. Consequently, Schopenhauer's politics is easy to summarize. It consists of a slender account of the purpose and character of statehood as a necessary condition of a peaceful collective life. As described earlier, Schopenhauer assigned the state a defined, minimalistic task – the reduction of harm – and did not think it could or should embody an ethnic or cultural character, realize a spiritual or ethical cause, or seek to establish justice by means of redistribution. For him, the state put a muzzle on ferocious beasts and nothing more – that was the content of his politics.

Yet Schopenhauer's scattered but nonetheless detailed discourse on the nature and utility of prudence indicates that he believed that the pacifying work of the state must be supplemented by an account of beneficial techniques of self-governance geared toward conflict reduction. For him, state rule and individual self-regulation belonged together. The state is meant to suppress the latent war of all against all, but Schopenhauer assigned a similar task to prudent politeness: instrumentally motivated civility is a "cold virtue" that serves to conceal mutual antipathy and reduce open conflict.[70] As mentioned above, he thought brash and impolite behavior irrationally self-destructive. While techniques of prudent reserve cannot curb anarchy in the same way as "the institution of the state," they nonetheless serve to "cloak" mutual hatred and prevent

manifest conflicts (BM: 192). Anyone who wants to realize aims in the world and avoid trouble on the way needs to control aggressive impulses, to avoid the "collisions of egoism that occur at every step" (BM: 193). Indeed, Schopenhauer saw statehood and prudent civility as two complementary ways to manage egoism and achieve an "unmurderous coexistence."[71] The state imposes constraints on the expression or enactment of egoism from above, whereas the prudent politeness of circumspect individuals serves the "denial of egoism ... in everyday intercourse" (BM: 191).

Schopenhauer's coordinated characterizations of centralized statehood and personal prudence have a historical background. As the historian Gerhard Oestreich has argued, the rise of the absolutist early modern state, headed by a royal sovereign, required a weakening of local and regional authorities, an attenuation of traditional feudal bonds of mutual personal loyalty, and the construction of a centralized bureaucracy staffed with civil servants. Yet the rise of the absolutist state was also, Oestreich claims, accompanied by a process of "social disciplining [*Sozialdisziplinierung*]."[72] This program of discipline aimed to replace attitudes of honor, valiance, gallantry, and adventurous daring with modern ones such as moderation, modesty, sobriety, self-control, and discretion,[73] a bundle of notions drawn from Stoic thought and reintroduced by scholars such as the Dutch author Justus Lipsius (1547–1606). According to this influential narrative, early modern state building was prepared and consolidated by a discourse of self-discipline that suited the demands of professional conduct that were placed on individuals in the new hierarchical contexts of a regular and uniform military and a civil administration, both of which were directed by the sovereign. The absolute state, tasked with the neutralization of civil war and unrest, could not function very well in a cultural and moral vacuum. This new state instead relied on a new ethos of careful self-management and self-curation by subjects commanded and protected within it. In short, noble warriors had to be taught "the virtues of self-control."[74]

Schopenhauer never set out to chart systematically the rise of the modern state and was generally uninterested in historicist thinking. Yet he nonetheless displayed a parallel preference for a seventeenth-century theorist of the centralized state (Hobbes) and a seventeenth-century theorist of prudent behavior (Gracián), both of whom he felt promoted order and peacefulness over chaos and public hostility. He even considered the rule of the impersonal state incomplete unless it was supplemented by the prudent conduct of the individual seeking to realize private aims without

instigating interpersonal conflicts. Some responsibility for peace, he held, rested on individuals. While they were not obliged to act unselfishly, they could be enjoined to act discreetly: "To show rage or hatred in words or gestures is useless, dangerous, imprudent" (PP I: 409). For Schopenhauer, the expansion of the policing function of government, that is, the authority of the state to issue prohibitions and ordinances aiming at the maintenance of good order,[75] had to be matched by the ability of individual subjects to exhibit politeness. The mutually supportive functions of state discipline and self-discipline, policing and politeness, are clearly on display in the chapter on anti-moral incentives and egoism in *On the Basis of Morals*. Here, Schopenhauer explained that the state opposes universal egoism by means of "external force" (BM: 192), whereas politeness hides the expression of egoism by means of conventional "hypocrisy" in "everyday intercourse" (BM: 191). For him, statecraft and personal prudence were complementary methods of maintaining order and peace.

Schopenhauer's political thought fused seventeenth-century philosophy of statehood and seventeenth-century maxims of wary politeness. This coordinated propagation of centralized policing and the ethos of prudent self-control reveals its historical character at a few telling points in his works. The clearest example is Schopenhauer's rant against the aristocratic code of chivalric honor in *Parerga and Paralipomena*. In a long segment heaping scorn on the custom of dueling among noblemen and officers, Schopenhauer argued forcefully for the complete replacement of a feudal "knightly honor" focused on the maintenance of personal respect (PP I: 333) by a civic honor focused on smoothly "peaceful intercourse" with others (PP I: 318). He did so with full knowledge of the class character of the societal reform. Schopenhauer himself defined civic honor as the scrupulous attention to "mine and thine" along with the fulfilment of obligations entered and promises made (PP I: 328) and explicitly associated this ethos with the rising "middling class" (PP I: 318). Comparing the two codes – chivalric and civil, feudal and bourgeois – he also noted their respective historical developments. Chivalric honor arose among the aristocracy during the European Middle Ages, during which the absence of a centralized state meant that individual noblemen were compelled to respond with force to any perceived slight to their status; it was paramount to reestablish quickly and decisively the regard for their rights. In feudal society, punishment for a reputational assault had to be meted out by the offended (aristocratic) party, a "small sovereign," through a duel (PP I: 334). With the gradual decline of feudalism and its myriad of tiny lords through the consolidation of a state under one sovereign, however,

reputational restoration by duel had become obsolete. The centralized state equipped with a "judiciary and police" (PP I: 339) had, Schopenhauer emphasized, taken over "the protection of our person and property" (PP I: 333). In these new circumstances, he argued, the principles of the chivalric code are relics, like medieval "castles and watch-towers" that stand "useless and abandoned between well-cultivated fields and busy roads and even railways" (PP I: 333). In the resulting, more pacific civil society, free to occupy itself with commerce along modern channels of communication and transportation, individual noblemen should no longer be allowed to defend their honor with weapons. Instead, the adherence to a civic, bourgeois honor in the form of dutiful observance of contractual obligations allows people to deal with others peacefully and profitably.

The key historical development for Schopenhauer was, however, the rise of the centralized state commanded by an absolute sovereign. One can catch a glimpse of this rise of sovereignty in Schopenhauer's literary examples. The paragon of prudential reserve in Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* is the consummate courtier Antonio, who is a servant of the Duke of Ferrara and not a man of the bourgeoisie. Nor did the patriot saint of prudence, Baltasar Gracián, live in an era of fully developed capitalist society.[76] He spent his time in seigniorial and ecclesiastical circles close to a royal administration.[77] Although Gracián himself remains vague about the exact social circumstances in which prudence becomes imperative, the setting is the early modern state in which accomplished men climb hierarchies and build alliances through a "calculated strategy of linguistic expression" rather than bloody deeds.[78] In Schopenhauer's works, then, both Goethe and Gracián provide insights into a society in which members of the elite pursue advantages at courts among superiors and rivals and seek to become the favorites of leaders and rulers[79] by gaining and applying a fine knowledge of human motivations.[80] In the never-ending game of impression management and reciprocal observation, sociopolitical survival and advancement require a program of arduous "self-fashioning" and vigilant self-presentation.[81] As Schopenhauer himself wrote, the "hothead" must by long practice become a "distinguished man of the world" and the "boor" turn into a subtle "courtier" (PP I: 400). For Schopenhauer, early modern statehood was thus accompanied and supported by a culture of individual "self-conditioning" by which excessively temperamental and violent men could become controlled and "reserved" and in this way fit into a pacific environment (PP I: 400).

What frustrated Schopenhauer when he looked at his own time and place, the first half of nineteenth-century Germany, was the evident

unsuitability and uselessness of the feudal, pre-absolutist code of honor. When the modern Hobbesian state had absorbed the administration of justice to drain society of interpersonal score-settling, old habits like feuding and dueling were absurd and dangerous. For all his criticism of feudal barbarism, Schopenhauer did not exactly argue for milder, more humane punishments. In fact, he thought that the centralized state should continue to apply corporeal punishments for wrongdoing: "whoever is not receptive to reasons will be so to a beating" (PP I: 338). In cases in which condemned individuals could not pay a fine "because they have no possessions," a serving of "moderate flogging" could do the job (PP I: 338). Schopenhauer's point was that *only* the unitary sovereign state should be allowed to apply violence, not a plurality of insulted aristocrats and officers appealing to an out-of-date honor code. He also suspected that the obsolete chivalry persisted not because German states had failed to establish a monopoly of violence, but because governments were unwilling to offer their military and civil elites adequate material compensation. Cheap regimes that tried to keep renumeration low would try to prop up the pride of officers and civil servants with the help of "titles, uniforms, and medals," all meant to keep alive artificially a sense of traditional honor (PP I: 338). Yet precisely such an honor code was of no use in a society of centralized statehood and lively commerce. Interestingly, Schopenhauer ignored the extent to which the language of honor and the practice of dueling had become part of the behavioral repertoire of the educated German bourgeoisie of his own era. With its close ties to the state and widespread admiration for the military elite, dueling was in fact quite prevalent among student fraternities and the general male population of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*.[82] Schopenhauer's distaste for dueling thus confirms his distance to the academic milieus of his time; he never gained a university position and did not participate in its adopted culture of honor.

There were, Schopenhauer noted, two main problems with the needless survival of knightly honor into the modern era, and two corresponding solutions. The first problem was that states allowed their monopoly of violence to be fragmented by weapon-bearing men who insisted that they had a right to erase "with blood" taints to their personal honor (PP I: 326). This effectively meant that the government condoned the scandalous existence of a "state within the state" (PP I: 339). The solution was, of course, a more perfect and total control over the means of punishment, a more resolute exercise of state sovereignty, and the banishment of absurdly anachronistic residues of knightly violence. The second problem was the more intractable one of human nature. It was entirely natural for human

beings, Schopenhauer conceded, to "answer hostility with hostility and be embittered and aggravated by signs of contempt or hatred" (PP I: 335). In a society in which a state alone is tasked with the protection of personhood and private property, however, it was incumbent on all individuals to suppress expressions of rage and hatred and avoid rudeness so as not to provoke conflict. Everyone must try hard not to reciprocate taunts or manifestations of loathing. When insults do occur, Schopenhauer stated, "genuine self-esteem will make us truly indifferent, and where this does not happen, prudence and culture will instruct us to keep up appearances and conceal our anger" (PP I: 336). Anger and dislike might be ineradicable in human beings, but the outward manifestations of these affects must be contained through practiced self-discipline. Schopenhauer had little hope in actively trying to make people virtuous and somehow root out their natural hostility. He did, however, have some faith in prudence, that is, the intellect in the service of self-interest, to prevent quickly escalating cycles of violence that are typical of a society of honor. In his view, the modern, centralized state's supervision of its disarmed subjects should be completed by their general civic adherence to prudential norms of polite interaction. In other words, the government of the state should be supplemented by the government of the self.

Schopenhauer's Political Program

A comprehensive examination of prudence in Schopenhauer's writings reveals that he treated it as a specifically political acumen. Prudence was for him the key skill for anyone who seeks to manage interpersonal encounters and influence worldly affairs, the signature of the smooth operator as well as of the historic statesman. Not known for his political interests, Schopenhauer clearly did develop a conception of political action as well as a portrait of the politician, the latter articulated through a series of contrasts such as prudence versus wit, or the prudent man of the world versus the aloof genius. His extended discussion of how an ethos of dignified politeness must replace values of honor in a modern world of centralized state sovereignty even suggests that previous analyses of Schopenhauer's politics are incomplete. His account of the centralized state as a necessary instrument of society-wide pacification deceptively stands out as his only contribution to political thought. Yet Schopenhauer's treatment of the state does not exhaust his political thinking, because he himself understood the prudent exercise of "mutual self-constraint" as a much-needed attitude of modern state

subjects (PP I: 337). In his view, the construction of an absolute state must be supplemented by a profound and universal reform of individual behavior.

Schopenhauer's recurrent reflections on prudence constitute what we could call the hidden half of his political thought. The core problem of all politics in Schopenhauer's philosophy is the always latent hostility that is found among ferocious egoists. At the level of the collective, this problem is addressed through the formation of a state, and at the level of individual agents, this problem is managed by personal prudence. Schopenhauer even thought that the issue of violent conflict among egoists required a two-pronged approach: the state should monopolize the use of violent means and neutralize anarchic tendencies in society, but individuals must also give up their passion for personal honor and learn to practice caution and calculated reserve. For the sake of enduring public peace and security, the centralized state and the program of prudent self-restraint must work together.

Notes

1 Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, vol. 1, 99. My translation.
2 Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß,* vol. 1, 99. My translation.
3 Frauenstädt, *Memorabilien*, 140.
4 Frauenstädt, *Memorabilien*, 140.
5 Frauenstädt, *Memorabilien*, 139.
6 Frauenstädt, *Memorabilien*, 264.
7 Frauenstädt, *Memorabilien*, 261.
8 Wilhelm Gwinner, *Schopenhauer und seine Freunde: Zur Beleuchtung der Frauenstädt-Lindner'schen Vertheidigung Schopenhauer's sowie zur Ergänzung der Schrift "Arthur Schopenhauer aus persönlichem Umgange dargestellt"* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1863), 16.
9 Wicks, Robert, "Arthur Schopenhauer," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2021), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/schopenhauer/.
10 Beiser, *Weltschmerz*, 56–9.
11 Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 265.
12 Elizabeth Asmis, Shadi Bartsch, and Martha Nussbaum, "Seneca and His World," in *The Complete Tragedies*, Lucius Seneca, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), vii–xxix; xvi.
13 Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, vol. 1, 353. My translation.
14 Daniel Scott Mayfield, *Artful Immorality – Variants of Cynicism: Machiavelli, Gracián, Diderot, Nietzsche* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 200–1.

15 Elena Cantarino, "Die Übersetzung von Graciáns Handorakel," in *Schopenhauer Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, 2nd ed., ed. Daniel Schubbe and Matthias Koßler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2018), 181–3; 181. On the German Enlightenment reception of Gracián, see also Steffen Martus, *Aufklärung: Das deutsche 18. Jahrhundert – Ein Epochenbild* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2015), 98–9.
16 Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, vol. 4.2, 133.
17 Sandra Shapshay, "Poetic Intuition and the Bounds of Sense: Metaphor and Metonymy in Schopenhauer's Philosophy," in *Better Consciousness: Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Value*, ed. Alex Neill and Christopher Janaway (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 58–76; 68.
18 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 111.
19 Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, 110–11.
20 Cantarino, "Die Übersetzung von Graciáns Handorakel," 182.
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