CHAPTER 4

Beyond Morality and Politics
Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Sociability

Johanna Schopenhauer's Weimar Salon

Most Thursdays and Sundays, Arthur Schopenhauer's mother Johanna Schopenhauer invited a gathering of friends and acquaintances into her home in Weimar.[1] The guests at her regular 6 pm salon drank tea and ate sandwiches, waffles, or almond cake; they chatted, told stories, joked, and discussed travels, art works, theater performances, recent journal articles, and sometimes even political events, although most guests avoided invidious issues. Some visitors also engaged in cultural activities themselves: they played music on piano and guitar and sang, recited poetry, and read out entire dramas, or made sketches, drew caricatures, and prepared decorations together. There were, a guest wrote, so many things to talk about, to do, or to enjoy in Johanna Schopenhauer's salon that few resorted to playing cards. At around 8:30 pm, the evenings were over; Ms. Schopenhauer had something to eat at 9 and went to bed around 11.

Letters and testimonies tell us who came to Schopenhauer's house regularly for tea. The group included the local cultured elite, among them the art historian and librarian Carl Ludwig Fernow (1763–1808); the librarian and gymnasium professor Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer (1774–1845); the translator, literary historian, and publisher Friedrich Justin Bertuch (1747–1822); the art historian and sketch artist Heinrich Meyer (1760–1832); the journalist and editor Stephan Schütze (1771–1839); the religious author and founder of a pedagogical institute for orphans Johannes Daniel Falk (1768–1826); and Caroline Bardua (1781–1864), a talented painter and one of the first German women artists to sustain herself economically. By far the most famous regular guest was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who was in his late fifties and early sixties in the years he frequented Johanna's salon. At the time, he was easily the most admired author in German-speaking Europe, and the obvious center of gravity in the cultural circles of contemporary Weimar. Goethe was one of the guests who regularly declaimed poetry, organized readings, or drew

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sketches, and seemingly without effort he turned the Schopenhauer salon into a stage for his enticing personality, alternating between magnetic charm and distracted aloofness.[2] Many of the lesser-known guests were associated with Goethe in some way or other: Riemer, for instance, had been the house teacher of Goethe's son and would later publish Goethe's letters and edit key works; and Meyer was a good friend of Goethe's and collaborated on several planned art-historical projects. In a letter to her teenage son in 1806, Johanna Schopenhauer expressed the conviction that the group that gathered twice a week in her home was without comparison in all of Germany.[3] Once the salon had gained a reputation, notable visitors to Weimar would also make appearances, among them the siblings Bettina and Clemens Brentano (1785–1859; 1778–1842), Achim von Arnim (1781–1831), and Caroline and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1766–1829; 1767–1835).[4]

Goethe may have been the most famous at the social gatherings in Weimar, but Johanna Schopenhauer was the hostess and organizer and maintained its light and welcoming spirit. After all, Goethe came to *her* house for company and relaxation.[5] The author Schütze described her in 1806 as a veritable genius of sociability. An educated, high-bourgeois woman[6] and unusually experienced and observant traveler[7] with a sure grasp of the conventions and unspoken rules of the world, Johanna Schopenhauer knew how to initiate and sustain conversations. She did not, Schütze noted, dictate what should be discussed or dominate anyone's attention. Instead, she pleasantly and subtly moved everyone from topic to topic and made sure there were no awkward pauses, something that many books on the art of polite conversations treated as a minor disaster.[8] With her as the self-evident but nonetheless unintrusive facilitator, the conversations never came to a halt.[9] She herself seems to have believed in the restorative, reanimating qualities of sociability – her close friend Fernow, she indicated, seemed to heal from poor health thanks to the rich "sociable life" in the Weimar circle.[10] In an 1807 letter to Arthur Schopenhauer, she shared her suspicion that Goethe's hypochondria evaporated, at least momentarily, whenever he "warmed up" in good company.[11] Goethe himself characterized sociable conversation as an activity approaching art. The sociable life around Ms. Schopenhauer, he wrote in 1808 to his close friend the poet and translator Karl Ludwig von Knebel (1744–1834), would soon assume a completed, rounded "artful shape [*Kunstform*]."[12] In Johanna Schopenhauer's salon, conversations possessed a richly varied yet "concentrated" form, and sociability was on its way to achieving a state of perfection.[13] Johanna Schopenhauer had arrived at Weimar after the end of the most intensely mythologized period of classical German

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literature, namely, the years during which Goethe and Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) both lived in Weimar and nearby Jena and cooperated on literary projects, from 1794 to 1805.[14] Yet even in the shadow of the era of the Goethe-Schiller alliance, her Weimar drawing room still qualifies as an example of the rich salon culture of the early nineteenth century.

For all the talk of the suppleness and quiet elegance with which Schopenhauer orchestrated social life in Weimar, she was an ambitious woman who arrived in the town in 1806 with a definite plan. After the death of her husband in the spring of 1805, she liquidated the family business and moved to the Duchy of Saxe-Weimar, which she described as a pleasant principality with a good theater and luscious parks, dense with illustrious cultural personalities and yet materially affordable. About forty years old at the time,[15] she was not about to retire and merely live a pleasant, unassuming life; it was her expressed purpose to assemble the finest minds around her tea table at least once a week.[16] To the sociologist Randall Collins, her carefully executed trajectory from wealthy merchant circles in North German port cities such as Hamburg to Goethe's Weimar nicely exemplifies "the investment of money in the single-minded pursuit of cultural eminence."[17] She did not shed her bourgeois identity completely; instead, her receptions became, for about half a decade starting in 1806, the most important non-aristocratic social focal point in Weimar, a gathering place for the non-noble academics and literati in a town dominated by the court.[18] It was in fact her relative distance from the strict decorum of the courtly circles that first allowed her to recruit Goethe into her circle.[19] In 1806, Goethe had married Christiane Vulpius (1765–1816), his longtime lover and the mother of his son, but the relationship was viewed as improper and Goethe's wife was barred from entry to the Duchy's courtly circles, even though Goethe was an important minister and favorite of the Duke. Johanna Schopenhauer, however, was happy to welcome Goethe's new spouse.[20] As a "stranger and urbanite [*Fremden und Großstädterin*]," Johanna wrote to her son, Goethe trusted Schopenhauer to open her house to his wife and thereby ease his wife's entry into local social life.[21] The first time Johanna Schopenhauer met Christiane von Goethe was on the day of her wedding to Johann Wolfgang, which was celebrated in the chaos of the Napoleonic occupation of Weimar.[22]

Johanna Schopenhauer was, however, not entirely free from the status hierarchy of the day. She did invite nobility to her salon, and even the Duke Carl August would sometimes make an appearance in her circle.[23] As a non-noble woman, however, she was far from a regular guest at the

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court and was invited only on a few occasions. Eager to adjust to the local etiquette and distinguish herself from the lower classes, she called herself Hofräthin Schopenhauer, a title that was then used by visitors and regular guests, including Goethe.[24] The title was legitimate, according to her son: Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer had indeed been named a Hofrath or Councilor by the Polish king Stanislaw August Poniatowsky (1732–98) but had, as a proud businessman and committed republican, eschewed the use of the title.[25] Johanna adopted it and was also rumored to desire ennoblement. According to unreliable sources, Duke Carl August had felt that she had simply added Hofräthin to her name without his proper, official approval.[26] In her time, Johanna could be praised as a cultivated, unprejudiced woman with a great interest in the arts and good company – and dismissed as an upstart grasping for more status.[27]

The young Arthur Schopenhauer went to his mother's salon now and then during his time in Weimar, from the early winter 1807, when he moved from a gymnasium in Gotha in Thuringia, to the fall of 1809, when he commenced his studies at the university of Göttingen in Hanover. As a private pupil seeking to qualify for a university education under the supervision of a local gymnasium professor, he was the salon's youngest and least distinguished guest, present only because of his connection to his mother. He seems to have gone largely unnoticed; very few documents from the circle even mention his presence.[28] He found himself playing an entirely peripheral role in his mother's social circle.

The letters from the period reveal, moreover, that Johanna considered her son's personality completely unsuited for the demands of sociability. He was, she wrote to him, most welcome to join her on her "days of socializing [*Gesellschaftstagen*]" yet he must abstain from all disputatiousness and all lamentation over the stupid world and human misery, since his constant arguing and complaining spoiled her mood and troubled her sleep.[29] Arthur's behavior clearly disturbed her peace when they were alone together or with Adele, his younger sister, but she also implied that his demeanor was diametrically opposed to everything required by a fluid conversation. His tendency to make definitive, "oracular pronouncements" was anathema to the reciprocity of a light discussion, in which every contribution should allow for further contributions in an elegant sequence.[30] His "bizarre judgments" indicated a lack of polish and worldly grasp of accepted opinion in educated circles.[31] Finally, his combativeness threatened to ruin the sociable atmosphere in which everyone gracefully committed to maintaining a pleasant, nonconflictual attitude. Arthur Schopenhauer was too assertive and aggressive for the drawing room.

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He lacked agreeableness, and Johanna Schopenhauer even pointed out that he looked darkly morose, an appearance not fit for an evening of friendly talk in the salon.[32] In her salon and her life, she sought to uphold values such as elegance, lightness, and balance – all captured in the German concept of *Heiterkeit* – associated with Weimar and with Goethe,[33] whereas her son negated them.

The tense, increasingly bitter mother-son relationship would eventually collapse. When Arthur was in his mid-twenties, in 1813, after a series of quarrels about finances and the household presence of Johanna's male friend, the jurist and amateur author Müller von Gerstenbergk (1778–1838), she disowned Arthur in a letter.[34] After Arthur's move to Dresden in 1814, they never met in person again. She died well over two decades later, in 1838.

Schopenhauer's Loneliness

Schopenhauer's biographers have often portrayed him as an unsociable person, even something of a recluse. Describing Schopenhauer's student years in Berlin, the early biographer Gwinner claims that he rarely visited any of the pubs or clubs where people meet to discuss the issues of the day.[35] His indifference to the nationalist cause that inspired so many fellow students may have had something to do with not being a regular member of a circle of young men. The tendency toward self-isolation caused Schopenhauer to stand apart from the "current of the time [*Strom der Zeit*]."[36] Gwinner also cites the testimony of Karl Witte (1800–83), a former child prodigy and eventual Dante specialist who spent time with Schopenhauer in Italy and reported that the philosopher's combative style of speaking alienated his peers in the colony of Germans in Rome.[37] The later biographer and editor of Schopenhauer's collected works, Arthur Hübscher, notes that Goethe was the only literary and cultural figure of the age with whom Schopenhauer had a productive personal relationship. Schopenhauer did once meet the Italian composer Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) but did not say a single word. He was never visited by his ardent admirer Richard Wagner (1813–83), and his few meetings with authors and intellectuals of his time, such as the dramatist Christian Friedrich Hebbel (1813–63), were never warm or enjoyable.[38] Schopenhauer's manner of speaking to others, Hübscher adds, was rarely inviting; he could hold forth in a lively way but always in a "didactic" tone, unsuited for friendly conversation.[39] Even in the case of Goethe, the relationship was not quite friendly and the two did not exactly socialize.

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Speaking of the young man he had met in Johanna Schopenhauer's salon, Goethe was not at all dismissive, but said that he "philosophized" rather than "conversed" with him.[40] Since both Goethe and Schopenhauer were interested in the question of colors during the time that Goethe worked on his *Theory of Colors* [*Farbenlehre*], the two began a working relationship in the winter of 1813–14 and conducted experiments together, yet the interaction between them remained formal and even grew increasingly tense.[41] Their temperaments could not have been more different, and for the literary scholar H. A. Korff, Schopenhauer's dark vision of endless suffering sharply contradicted Goethe's ethos of serene affirmation. According to Korff, Schopenhauer even represented the repudiation and veritable end of the "spirit of the Goethe age."[42]

Some of the descriptions of Schopenhauer's standoffishness might be a little exaggerated. Gwinner writes of Johanna's "never-satisfied" interest in *Geselligkeit*, and then describes her son as lonelier than any hermit,[43] even the loneliest person in the world: "the Indian anchorite is a sociable being in comparison with him [Schopenhauer]."[44] This is obvious hyperbole. Yet Schopenhauer himself did at times acknowledge that he was a deeply unsociable person. In a letter written in the year of his death, 1860, he admitted to his old Weimar acquaintance, Goethe's daughter-in-law Ottilie von Goethe (1796–1872), that he had always been reserved: "You know that I was never very sociable."[45] The realization did not come to him late in life. Even in his late thirties, he wrote in private notes that he had slowly become "systematically unsociable."[46] A few years later, he even claimed that he had, throughout his whole life, been "terribly alone" without the comfort of good friends and family, although he refused to blame his own behavior for his predicament;[47] his loneliness could be explained by the limited minds and narrow hearts of others.

By acknowledging his own "systematically" unsociable nature, however, Schopenhauer was not necessarily accepting failure. In *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, he contemptuously dismissed sociability as the domain of women and hence as an area of triviality; his unsociable nature was partly a blessing, not a fatal flaw. In contrast to the ancient world with its male-dominated symposia, Schopenhauer claimed, women regrettably presided over sociable occasions in the modern era, conferring a "frivolous and silly character" on all conversation (PP I: 335).[48] Schopenhauer may have celebrated politeness as a key political skill in his reflections on prudence, but he evidently saw it as a manly behavior best codified by Baltasar Gracián. He thus implicitly dismissed the common late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century idea that it was precisely women who most

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expertly could model civility and moderate hostility in society, and that the "semipublic-semiprivate form" of the salon was an excellent school of diplomacy.[49]

The disdainful comments on frivolous conversations in female-led salons were not isolated remarks. Schopenhauer's writings contain an elaborate critique of sociability that reconstructs its sources, even its etiology, and works out its adverse effects on thought. According to Schopenhauer, sociable conversation is necessarily empty, even degrading to the philosophically gifted, and it threatens to distract from the supposedly natural aristocracy among humans, which should be based on stark intellectual disparities. As we shall reconstruct, Schopenhauer's rejection of sociability, and with it the rejection of the world of his mother, even occupies a neatly prepared slot in his philosophical system.

This attack on sociability was not simply a theoretical condensation of a drawn-out family conflict or a concealed comeback directed at his mother. In the Romantic age, which coincided with Schopenhauer's youth, more than one writer and philosopher held up cultured sociability as an ideal life form in which the pathologies of modern society could be remedied and healed.[50] According to key Romantic authors, playful sociability involved reciprocity among speaking subjects rather than subordination and chains of command. It also consisted in spontaneous conversation rather than goal-oriented, instrumental communication, and of course took place in a mixed-gender setting rather than rigidly separated masculine/feminine spaces. Sociability could thus stand as an enactment of freedom and community over hierarchy and division. German Romantics explicitly articulated these ideas. In 1799, for instance, the young Romantic theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whose lectures Schopenhauer would attend in Berlin, produced an attempt at a "theory of sociable conduct" in which he explored, in a rather ponderous treatise form, how the practice of sociability draws people out from their narrow niches of professional activity and small cells of domestic life to engage with others in a free and stimulating play of thoughts and feelings.[51] According to Schleiermacher and other Romantic writers, sociability could be understood as the much-needed antidote to tendencies of specialization and mundane tedium, of social fragmentation and isolation. In the years 1797 to 1802, Schleiermacher himself was a frequent guest in the Berlin home of Henriette Herz (1764–1847), a Jewish salonnière whose house became the regular meeting place of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Rahel Varnhagen (1771–1833), and Dorothea Veit (1764–1839), who was the daughter of Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) and who would later marry

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the Romantic Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), another regular salon guest and close friend of Schleiermacher.[52]

Schopenhauer's rejection of sociability was thus a rejection of a key German Romanticist ideal, exemplarily cultivated in Herz's Berlin salon, in the Jena circle of the brothers Schlegel around 1800, and finally also in Weimar, in his mother's home. Schopenhauer denied that interesting ideas could originate in a mixed-gender setting, that serious thought could be a lively social enterprise, that elegant conversation could approach the status of art, and that graceful reciprocity could provide an image of a more egalitarian community. To Schopenhauer, sociability failed to meet the requirements of philosophical, aesthetic, or political activity. Yet Schopenhauer's view of sociability was not exclusively negative. Concerned with the demands of human community and the difficult choice between a terrible loneliness, hard to bear even for an exceptional individual, and a togetherness that could never satisfy a great mind, he also treated sociability as a medium for a philosophical theme that could not be adequately dealt with in other areas of his thought. This was the theme of human plurality, the fact that individuals are particular and different from one another and yet must interact and adjust to one another. For all his contemptuous rejection of the world of the salon, Schopenhauer ultimately supplied an account of sociable interaction that addressed the attractions and difficulties of community under conditions of human heterogeneity, a topic that neither his political nor his moral theory were designed to address. The activities of sociability, Schopenhauer implied, show that people relate to one another in ways not exhaustively covered by pure selfishness or pure selflessness, and hence in ways not thematized in his treatment of politics (the domain of egoism) or ethics (the domain of compassion).

Society in the System: Schopenhauer's Account of Sociability

Schopenhauer claimed that human sociability is rooted in a specific kind of human suffering. People socialize to escape from boredom, *Langeweile*, and boredom was for him a fundamental type of human suffering, deserving of a systematic treatment. The characterization of boredom and its relation to sociability is explained in book four of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, in sections 57–9, which put forward key arguments for pessimism.[53] In section 57 specifically, Schopenhauer describes how life is shadowed by death. Human beings cling to their lives and take the utmost care to extend them, but these lives are as fragile and transient as soap bubbles. During their finite time on earth, moreover, individuals

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typically oscillate between two kinds of suffering and pain. The first is easy to understand: animated by will, humans are striving beings who constantly pursue satisfaction in one form or another. Consequently, the near-constant state of being is one of perceived deficiency: people always want something that they do not yet have. This almost permanent sense of a "lack" is felt as a kind of "pain" (WWR I: 338). Humans are of course not constantly in acute physical pain, but they are almost always plagued by some yearning and concomitant frustration such as hunger, sexual desire, acquisitiveness, or pursuit of recognition.[54] Driven by will, human existence is fundamentally desirous, characterized by "perpetual striving" and for this reason marked by persistent dissatisfaction (WWR I: 338).

Yet there is also another kind of suffering, one that sets in after a dominant desire has been satisfied. This is the dull but no less relentless suffering of boredom. *Langeweile* may seem like a trivial concern compared to actual physical pain or desperate need.[55] For Schopenhauer, however, boredom's emergence is existentially revelatory and its radical forms are as destructive and torturous as other forms of pain. To begin with, boredom arises when desires are satisfied and the will that pulsates through the individual ceases to have a particular, concrete object; the struggle to satisfy some want, or more primarily the struggle to find food and to procreate, seemingly takes a pause. But Schopenhauer did not think that the removal of pain and the cessation of striving lead to anything but brief moments of relief; there is no enduring satisfaction. Instead, he argued that individuals without pressing tasks soon fall into a state of "terrible emptiness" (WWR I: 338). When nothing is to be achieved, desiring individuals suddenly lack focus and direction, and for inherently striving and goal-oriented beings, this absence is painful. To have nothing to do at all turns out to be another kind of problem, not the problem of unfulfilled desire and hunger but the problem of purposelessness: once people have "rid themselves of all other burdens," Schopenhauer thought, "they become burdens to themselves" (WWR I: 339). When life is adequately sustained, secured, and satisfied, which is the objective of primary desires, it presents itself as *sheer* existence and as such it disappoints.

Boredom is existentially revelatory, Schopenhauer argued, because the sensation of vacuity that descends upon us when bored betrays that existence itself is vacuous. If life itself, mere living and breathing, would be pleasurable and satisfying, he reasoned, there would be no boredom.[56] When the restless and painful struggle that is necessary to protect and extend life is stripped away and the individual encounters living itself, another sense of misery ensues – the misery of not willing anything

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particular and to feel that all of one's faculties are in a state of desolate "disuse."[57] To be driven by will but have no obvious object of that willing turns out to be unbearable; hence the "perpetual efforts to banish suffering do nothing more than alter its form" (WWR I: 341). Boredom can even be downright torturous and soul-crushing, Schopenhauer thought, and human beings deprived of opportunities for normal purposive activity typically sink into despair and self-destructiveness. Uninterrupted boredom resulting from solitary confinement, imposed passivity, and mental inactivity, he noted, was used as a method of punishment in the Philadelphia penitentiary system; it could drive inmates to suicide.[58]

In Schopenhauer's picture, human beings oscillate between two kinds of suffering: the suffering of unfulfilled needs and the suffering of aimlessness and boredom. At the level of the collective or the polity, both types of suffering are potential sources of unrest. A desperately hungry populace must be given bread and a bored and therefore restless populace must be distracted – Schopenhauer invoked the Roman adage "*panem et Circenses*" (bread and circuses) to name the two kinds of rebellious discontent (WWR I: 340). He also assigned these two complementary types of suffering to social classes: the common folk are afflicted with indigence and struggle to satisfy basic needs, whereas boredom is the scourge of the wealthy and distinguished. All the immediate needs of the wealthy are satisfied and they are not forced to labor, but the lack of activity haunts them in the form of ennui. Finally, boredom has a place in the regular pattern of social life: the six days of the work week, Schopenhauer suggested, represent the pain of necessity, and Sundays represent the pain of boredom (WWR I: 340).

Sociability occupies a defined and significant place in Schopenhauer's philosophical system because he understood it as the primary human reaction to boredom, which is one of the fundamental types of human suffering. People, Schopenhauer argued, do not dispel boredom by willingly inviting the hardship of need, although new desires will eventually compel them into action again. Instead, they escape boredom by seeking diversion, or they react to the discouraging experience of a vacuous existence and empty time by trying to "kill time" (WWR I: 339). Bored individuals seek stimulation and thrills, not arduous tasks that would only return them to the suffering of unfulfilled needs and desires. In this way, boredom generates an entire field of human activity, involving play, games, simulation, and consumption, all of which are forms of leisure rather than labor, distraction rather than contemplation. In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer added a long list of means used by regular philistines to ward off boredom: "ballet, theatre, society, card games, gambling, horses,

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women, drinking, travelling, and so on" (PP I: 301). It is this connection of the key concept of boredom to a whole world of human diversion that gives sociability a location in Schopenhauer's thought.

What, according to Schopenhauer, is sociability? It is a collective human activity, even a form of cooperation, through which humans relieve themselves of boredom as a form of suffering. Whereas urgent needs and desires for satisfaction often pit egoistic individuals against each other and create conflicts that must be held in check by the coercive state, boredom causes people to turn to one another in search of diversion. Sheer tedium, Schopenhauer observed, "makes beings with as little love for each other as humans nonetheless seek each other with such intensity, and in this way becomes the source of sociability" (WWR I: 339). Even though human beings are inveterate egoists, unconcerned with the well-being of others, they willingly congregate when they want to escape their deeply disconcerting encounters with the terrible emptiness of existence itself. The reason for turning to each other is that they can kill time more effectively through collective play and consumption: dancing, talking, gossiping, smoking, drinking, gambling, and traveling together all provide distraction and dispel boredom. Yet all these entertaining activities show that individuals do not always and under all conditions fight against each other. Boredom instead sets in once needs and desires have been satiated and a new or different kind of desire emerges, namely, the desire for escape from the burden of existence itself, and this kind of mental rather than material desire does not cause individuals to clash in a (latent) war of all against all. When people meet in the areas of social interaction – in the theater lobbies, drawing rooms, gentlemen's clubs, salons, restaurants, bars, casinos, spas, and sightseeing locations – they do not primarily seek to acquire means and satisfy immediate needs in a way that leads to collisions and hostilities. Instead, they gather to escape the pain of existence, to seek refuge from inactivity and mental stagnation in the presence of each other. People who socialize may still be rivalrous, combative, and malicious, and Schopenhauer singled out card playing as a particularly mindless but obviously competitive activity that artificially "sets in motion the *will* itself" (PP II: 67). On the whole, though, sociability represents a relatively pacific arena of human interaction, one set apart from politics and untouched by the state. Sociability draws individuals together in shared activities that are voluntary rather than forced, civil rather than aggressive or martial, sustained by the wish for relief and stimulation rather than dictated by material necessity.

It was partly sociability's peaceful vivacity that made Romantics hold it up as a proto-political ideal in Schopenhauer's age, when it was imagined

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as a utopia of self-regulating human interaction in no need of a supervising state.[59] For Schopenhauer, however, sociability could not fulfill any political function. Satiated and bored individuals who seek to escape the dread of a vacuous existence regularly enter spaces where they can meet and entertain themselves in each other's company – this is the sphere of sociability. Its existence in no way obviates the necessity of the subjection of all to a state. Willing and striving beings who naturally tend toward complete selfishness in their pursuit of satisfaction always require a sovereign to keep the war of all against all at bay – this is the proper sphere of politics and jurisprudence, the realm of right. Schopenhauer deemed sociability a recurrent phenomenon of society that had achieved some degree of leisure, not a generalizable model for all human interaction.

Schopenhauer's Critique of Sociability: Emptiness

The exploration of sociability reveals the careful composition of Schopenhauer's philosophy, in which his personal experiences and observations are placed in a spot that seems neatly prepared by the architecture of his system. Yet Schopenhauer did more than locate sociability in relation to his taxonomies of suffering and forms of collectivity. He developed a critical account of sociability meant to uncover its pathological constitution and pernicious effects. The activity of socializing is, Schopenhauer often repeated, antithetical to serious and sustained thinking, and high society even appears as a veritable enemy of philosophy. In this sense, Schopenhauer's philosophical treatment of sociability represents a coded critical response to the milieu of his mother, who had dedicated her mature years to hosting a salon.

The problem with sociability, Schopenhauer held, lies in its utter emptiness. It is not necessary for survival and procreation and does not serve as a medium of learning or philosophical thought. In Schopenhauer's idiom, it is an arena neither for the will nor for the intellect. Sociability does have a purpose, namely, diversion, but this does not lend it any weighty or meaningful content; mere distraction neither is strictly necessary for survival nor is it aspirational. The emptiness of sociability is in fact an extension of the sense of emptiness that causes people to seek it in the first place; it continues rather than departs from the vacuity that motivates it in the first place.

People seek diversion because they are bored. Boredom, however, does not descend on everyone who finds themselves without a pressing task or urgent desire. The highly intelligent, Schopenhauer claimed, are much less

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likely to be bored, because their "*inner* wealth" of reflections, thoughts, and ideas will keep their minds occupied and thus prevent their spirits from sinking into total lethargy. Thanks to the "inexhaustible activity" of their intellectual life, they can embrace and enjoy the moments when the will relents and leaves room for the engagement of the mind with its own contents (PP I: 288). Relatively unintelligent people, by contrast, confront nothing but their own "*inner emptiness*" once they are not motivated by a pressing desire for a concrete object; they themselves have no reserve content or intellectual energy when the struggle for survival and expansion temporarily subsides (PP I: 287). In those moments of boredom, loneliness becomes unbearable, because the lack of stimulating input from others, from the outside, forces them to dwell in the wasteland that is their own minds. The "natural drive for sociability" is strong among the obtuse and weak among the intellectually eminent, Schopenhauer believed, because leisurely or festive interaction with others serves to distract from an emptiness that is the symptom of intellectual shortcomings (PP I: 376). What separates intelligent from dull minds, then, is that the former can do so much more with what they perceive and remember and hence are in less need of constant "external stimulation" (PP I: 287); the mental "play" of their complex thoughts can easily renew itself, and their minds can engage in new combinations and constellations of impressions, observations, and reflections that delight in fresh ways and prevent the onset of boredom (PP I: 288). Highly intelligent individuals can even be overwhelmed and disturbed by too many or too powerful outside stimuli and typically choose to live a "quiet, modest life, as undisturbed as possible" (PP I: 288). Oversensitivity to the turbulence of the outside world, Schopenhauer indicated, is the price for being intellectually talented.

In this context, it becomes clear that the problem with the less intelligent is not necessarily that they depend on outside input – everyone does. The issue is instead that they need it more continuously and in stronger doses, which they typically find in luxury, thrills, spectacles, travels, scandals, and titillating gossip. The high point of life for a dullard, Schopenhauer declared with confidence, comprises "oysters and champagne," and such a person generally likes everything that provides strong sensual impulses, such as high-stakes gambling, trips to exotic locations, and alcoholic beverages, all of which are associated with leisure and sociability (PP I: 300–1). But these potent external stimuli also soon wear off and the thrill-seeking individual sinks back into boredom. For the socializing philistine, Schopenhauer noted, even "card games finally become tiresome" (PP I: 301).

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When not pushed by the will that constitutes their being, unintelligent people find themselves in the empty space of their minds and immediately crave stimulation, which they find in the medium of sociability. It follows, Schopenhauer thought, that sociability itself is empty, since the coordination of empty minds in sociable pursuits does not miraculously yield some new and interesting content. Any sociable gathering was for Schopenhauer instead an immediate revelation of its participants' dullness. Empty minds are easily bored, bored people tend to socialize to find stimulation, and hence sociable groups are nothing but congregations of empty minds. From the perspective of thought, sociability is just vacuity prolonged and enlarged.

Schopenhauer often phrased this critique of sociability in terms of the relationship between the will and the intellect. According to him, the intellect is a mere instrument in service of the will. The will, he explained in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, is "the primary and substantial element in all animal beings, whereas the intellect is secondary, adventitious, indeed a mere tool" (WWR II: 216). In another passage, Schopenhauer called the intellect the merely advisory "cabinet council" of the will, which rules as the sovereign, a figure with undivided power whose commands are always obeyed (WWR II: 235). He also pictured the will as a "strong blind man" who carries a paralyzed but "seeing" person on his shoulders – the intellect (WWR I: 220); again, the intellect itself works when it is needed for the purposes of the will. This intimate but hierarchical relationship between will and intellect explains how a will without a concrete purpose also switches off the intellect in all but the most supremely intelligent people. The will is nearly always striving, but in the moments that it has obtained what it wants – in the temporary, Sunday-like stillness that arrives at the point of satiation and exhaustion – the intellect also relaxes: it "lapses into idleness as soon as the will does not drive it" (PP II: 67). This idleness and inactivity of the cognizing mind, however puny its powers are, is the source of boredom,[60] and it does not afflict the happy few whose intellects are sufficiently powerful and energetic to engage in self-stimulation.

In addition, Schopenhauer inferred the emptiness of sociability from the human organism's tendency to economize. The will needs the intellect to navigate in the world, discover opportunities, choose among courses of action, forecast harmful consequences, and so on, but it does not want to use its instrument wastefully. Human beings thus operate with the "*smallest expenditure of thought*" possible (PP II: 65); as thinking itself is strenuous, it should be limited, and only engaged in as much as the

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situation demands. When people enjoy a day of rest, or even just a few "hours free of work," they thus prefer to not think at all and instead languish and stare at the world (PP II: 65). It follows that the sociable interaction that pulls people together during their leisure time rarely consists in much more than "merely being together" (PP II: 65); sociability assembles people who are bored but simultaneously resistant to strenuous thinking and whose conversations are therefore "pitiful" (PP II: 65).

Schopenhauer painted a consistent picture of sociability as a kind of noisy, busy vacuousness. Allowed a moment of relief from the will's insistent needs, the individual faces an inner emptiness and inactivity but is not willing or able to populate it with strenuously generated thoughts. The vacuum must instead be filled by a stream of impressions that dispel boredom without truly prompting the intellect to exert itself. Sociable leisure pursuits such as smoking, drinking, chatting, gambling, and watching light theater or spectacles fit this dual demand: they satisfy people's craving for various kinds of stimulation, but they do so in a trivial manner, without prompting any reflection or analysis. The activities of sociability let average human beings absorb excitements from the outside without provoking any serious thought. Sociability works as a distraction from vacuity and burdensome lethargy, not as a genuine remedy for it.

Schopenhauer's Critique of Sociability: Degradation

In his characterization of sociability as rooted in emptiness, Schopenhauer relied on elements from his philosophy of cognition and will, such as the unequal capacity of individuals for analytical observation and conceptual combination and the intimate but hierarchical relationship between will and intellect. Yet he also developed a critical social analysis of the phenomenon of sociability. When empty minds come together, gregariousness is merely empty. But when socializing takes place across intellectual levels, Schopenhauer felt, it becomes damaging, at least for those who are truly intelligent, since they become entangled in conversations and pursuits that drag them down and exhaust them. Even worse, sociability as a large domain of human activity generates its own values and ranks, which do not align with those that Schopenhauer deemed important. Particularly in so-called high society, traits such as charisma, wealth, and taste take precedence over the truly significant and noble gifts of philosophical minds, to Schopenhauer's dismay. Politics and religion, the state and the church, actively conspire to suppress the unrestricted pursuit of philosophy, but sociability also smothers thought and marginalizes thinkers. The alliance between altar and throne that

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Schopenhauer understood as beneficial to hegemonic rule could be openly hostile and dangerous to thought, but the high society of the salon, he claimed, could be "*insidious*" (PP I: 370). Sociability may seem superficially attractive with its promise of diversion, communication, and "sociable pleasures," but behind this false surface lies tedium and even quiet compulsion (PP I: 370). Translated into biographical terms: Johanna Schopenhauer's salon was, in Schopenhauer's eyes, a directly anti-philosophical institution, a means to prevent, suppress, and diminish the importance and glory of thought. Not surprisingly, the mature Schopenhauer advised that intelligent people above all learn to "*tolerate solitude*" (PP I: 370).

Schopenhauer's most damning criticism of sociability starts from the assumption that intelligence is unevenly distributed. This elitist approach is narrow and harsh: he approached all of society, the entire human population, according to the criterion of who can produce meaningful philosophical thought. Of course, he felt that he himself, and almost nobody else around him, belonged to this group. The number of truly worthy individuals, he believed, is always desperately small. This intellectual separation is not necessarily a significant problem in the fields of politics and morality, in which the most important aspect of individual personalities is the extent to which they are egoistic or compassionate. The state is not erected to deal with the fact that people are not uniformly gifted, and the quality of moral character does not coincide with intelligence. Nor are disparate levels of intelligence decisive when people engage in objective, purpose-oriented business with one another. Schopenhauer advised readers to avoid sociable interaction with almost everyone but did not issue the same warning for transactions. He thought it was perfectly fine to speak to most people in "matters of business" (PP II: 67).

Varied levels of intelligence do matter in the case of sociability, however, because its character and quality reflect the participants' minds, their capacity for wit, brilliance, eloquence, and insight. Sociability consists in pure social interaction, typically in conversation, and the conversation is only as good as the intellectual ability of the interlocutors. The existence of a veritable aristocracy of the mind was axiomatic for Schopenhauer, but he thought this stubborn fact about human inequality becomes especially noticeable in the realm of sociability, in which people no longer interact with one another for purely practical purposes and do not treat each other as obstacles for their own pursuits. Sociable interaction occurs because people seek each other out *as* other people, because they desire the presence of other people and other minds. It is precisely for this reason that sociability also reveals just how dull-witted most people are.

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Schopenhauer viewed sociable interaction across an intellectual gap as a "degradation" or a "self-vulgarization of the first order" (PP II: 67). This drastic argument against sociability features a couple of steps. First, Schopenhauer claimed that intellectual eminence in a person remains forever invisible to someone who does not possess it: "Everyone sees in the other only as much as he is himself, for he can only grasp and comprehend in accordance with his own intelligence" (PP I: 393). And to the extent that average persons can dimly recognize the presence of mentally gifted individuals, they do not like it. Intelligence might in rare cases kindle admiration, but not warm appreciation: "Luminous intellectual qualities inspire wonder but not affection" (WWR II: 244). Second, Schopenhauer argued that every conversation between two people with different levels of intellectual capacity and spheres of knowledge must take place at the level of the least gifted, because it is impossible to raise anyone up or help them explore a world beyond their inflexible intellectual limits. This means that conversing and socializing with most people requires mentally gifted people to contain and reduce themselves: it is impossible to talk to most people, Schopenhauer claimed, "without during that time becoming *common* ourselves" (PP I: 393).

Schopenhauer's concern with the importance of the lowest common denominator can be reformulated in a more positive way. Most socializing and small talk involves detecting commonalities among participants. People search for common interests and shared experiences, and not infrequently they end up talking about the weather, an inoffensive topic of conversation and something that affects everyone and is accessible to all. Such a search for commonality is not in itself problematic. Schopenhauer himself pointed out that the synchronization of minds works best if people who are assembled can relate simultaneously to one object such as a piece of news, a beautiful view, or a theatrical or musical performance. In the moment when everyone directs their attention at the same thing, they have something in common and can achieve the required "uniformity of mood" (PP I: 392). Most often, people drink alcohol together to enjoy a collectively shared mood – "bottles are the ordinary means of bringing about such a common mood in a gathering" (PP I: 392). Yet for Schopenhauer, the coordination around something common to many means that the truly gifted individuals must stoop to the level of average fools. He even claimed that socializing requires exceptional people to engage in a kind of self-mutilation. They must hide their true identities, "reduce" themselves (PP I: 393), give up "three quarters" of their personalities, engage in "great self-denial," and even to "disfigure" themselves, all to fit into the narrow range

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of socially viable conversation (PP I: 369). To Schopenhauer, the seemingly pacific salon was a tortuous place.

Sociability means asymmetric adaptation and individuals can only be themselves when they avoid the socially necessary "accommodation" (PP I: 369). Schopenhauer is neither the first nor the last to level a critique at society's demand for self-betrayal and self-sacrifice. Many authors of Schopenhauer's period repudiated the imposed adaptation to commonality, conventionality, and appropriate social behavior and insisted on greater honesty and truthfulness.[61] Schopenhauer liked to cite the French aphorist Nicolas Chamfort (1741–94), who claimed that the sociability that takes place in all the fine "circles" and "salons" is nothing but a "miserable play," and then added that all the scintillating festivities of high society conceal an emptiness (PP I: 361). Sociability is duplicitous: it seduces with its glistening surface of easy conversation, comfort, polish, and sensual enjoyment, but the entire spectacle of "noble, elevated sociability" (PP I: 360) is rooted in boredom and accompanied by subtle forms of "constraint" (PP I: 373). In contrast to many other critics of sociability, however, the ultimate value for Schopenhauer was not Romanticist authenticity but the integrity of the intellectual elite. Those who suffer the most from socializing, and consequently those for whom the desire for sociability is a dangerous and corrupting inclination, is the very small group of highly intelligent and profound human beings. They only stand to lose through contact with obtuse others who invariably dominate in the spaces of sociable behavior because of their overwhelming number and their stronger need for distraction. In large social gatherings, Schopenhauer concluded, one always encounters a mob: "where there are many guests, there is much rabble" (PP I: 360).

Schopenhauer's critique reached its most intense point when he discussed how "so-called good society" ignores the most dramatic and important variety among human beings – their moral and intellectual capacity – and replaces it with a bundle of "artificial differences," such as the ones of estate and rank (PP I: 369). Fine society with its sensitivity to fashions does recognize "all kinds of merits," but never, Schopenhauer felt, the ones that truly matter, namely, mental or intellectual gifts (PP I: 369). By generating its own internal hierarchy and celebrating people for various nonintellectual virtues and achievements, good society creates an entirely nonnatural environment diametrically opposed to the ideal. Schopenhauer even spoke of the inverted world of sociability. When you enter society to interact with others, you must tolerate all sorts of idiocy and dullness all the while burying your actual abilities, values, ideas, and opinions. The intellectual

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elite, he believed, can never set the terms of interaction in venues of sociability. Resentful of perceived marginalization, Schopenhauer almost childishly insisted that those who withdraw from society are the true aristocrats, human beings of a "nobler kind," and that those who seek social company are "rascals" (PP I: 375).

The Absence of Human Plurality in Schopenhauer's Political and Moral Thought

Schopenhauer's treatment of sociability is characterized by scathing critique and sometimes by petulant defiance. To him, sociable interaction was a source of annoyance, disappointment, even mental torture. It would be strange to complain that a philosopher associated with pessimism lingers too much on one of the burdens of existence; Schopenhauer mustered all the arguments he could for his outlook and likely enumerated and explored all the various types and sources of suffering he could imagine. It makes sense that he would launch an attack on standard human sources of relaxation, diversion, entertainment, and fun. Still, sociability might strike some as simply too trivial a topic to justify a jaundiced view of life.

Yet the critique reconstructed above does not exhaust Schopenhauer's reflections on the world of sociability. The treatment of the sociable conversations and activities that transpire in salons, clubs, theater lobbies, and gambling parlors also allowed him to address more fully a thematic that clearly engaged him but for which he found little place in his political and moral thought, namely, the fact of human difference and heterogeneity. The existence of great individual variety within humanity is crucial for Schopenhauer and it sets the species apart from more uniform animal populations. Despite his contemptuous dismissal of the great majority of humans as mere "factory productions" (PP II: 536), or behaviorally predictable people without genuine particularity, he nevertheless insisted that human beings alone possess "real individual character" (PP II: 535). Humanity is irreducibly plural. Schopenhauer's accounts of politics and morality, however, are not fully equipped to address the fact that human beings are highly individual and distinct from each other and that they approach each other as such. His philosophical approaches to politics and morality are, as we shall see, based on the recognition that there are several individuals in the world of appearance, but not that those individuals are irreducibly particular and constitute a heterogeneous population. Politics and morality reckon with multiplicity but not quite with plurality.

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This is clear in the case of the political realm, which is the realm of interaction among rational egoists. For the egoist, which is to say for nearly all human beings, others do not really exist. Practically speaking, the egoist does not care about the welfare of others but seeks to satisfy their own needs and desires, even at the expense of fellow human beings. The egoist, Schopenhauer claimed, treats other individuals as mere "phantoms," and would allow for the destruction of the happiness or even the life of someone else even for a merely marginal increase in the egoist's own comfort and well-being (WWR I: 129). But as the word "phantoms" suggests, such ferocious egoism does not stem from direct hatred of others or an active wish to injure them, although Schopenhauer did provide an analysis of malice. Rather, the well-being of others does not matter for the egoist because those others are ontological lightweights. The egoist is a kind of practical solipsist.

In his moral theory, by contrast, Schopenhauer argued that compassionate individuals overcome the centrality of their own selves. Virtue, he claimed, consists in the ability to recognize one's being in others, to identify one's "lot with that of humanity" (WWR II: 622), and the criterion for an action of genuine "moral worth" is its non-egoistic character (BM: 197). In a world full of clashing egoists, the virtuous person acts altruistically, no longer driven by self-interest but genuinely committed to the welfare of others. Politics and morality are opposed: the state is needed because most people are selfish, whereas morality is rooted in selflessness.

Schopenhauer did not claim, however, that the virtuous come to appreciate the reality of others and therefore cease to treat them as mere "phantoms." Instead, non-egoistic actions occur because individuals feel compassion with others, and such compassion occurs because they have begun to identify with others so intensely that they even transcend the gulf that normally separates human beings from one another. Egoism presupposes radical divisions among people; compassion involves the "removal" of those divisions and overcomes the alien character of others (BM: 201). Compassion thus assigns reality to others through a kind of assimilation that erases their separateness; in the medium of compassionate feeling, others are not real *as* others, but both self and other are the same, indifferent, composed of an identical reality. Once the customary barrier between the I and the not-I has been dissolved, Schopenhauer believed, the selves effectively merge and the suffering of one becomes the suffering of another without mediation. This process, he concluded, is "mysterious" (BM: 201).

The mystery clears a little in the final section of the tract on morality, in which Schopenhauer provided a metaphysical explanation of compassion.

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In this closing chapter, Schopenhauer returned to his central philosophical thought that all individuals, in their "plurality and difference," only appear in the time and space imposed through perceptual representation (BM: 253). Beyond this realm of representation, however, the world is unitary. It is this metaphysical insight, Schopenhauer continued, that breaks through in moral behavior. In compassion, plurality and separateness dissolve as mere "appearance, illusion, phantasm" and individuality ceases to exist (BM: 253).

The specificity of sociable interaction emerges when it is contrasted with egoism and compassion, or politics and morality. Egoists, on the one hand, are practical solipsists who might fortify themselves against the incursions of others and cooperate for protection, but still naturally see those others as mere "phantoms." Compassionate people, on the other hand, understand individualization as an illusion; the appearance of distinct others is a mere "phantasm." For both the egoistic and the compassionate person, then, there are several other individuals, but the multiplicity is a surface phenomenon, not the inner truth of the world. This truth instead lies in unity, all too narrowly conceived by the egoist, who only grasps the reality of the self, but more broadly and profoundly conceived by the compassionate individual.

In the area of sociability, however, humans are neither ruthlessly egoistic nor genuinely selfless: they do not set out to repel or destroy those who oppose them with no regard for their well-being (egoism), nor do they feel everything that others feel with total regard for the welfare of those others (compassion). Sociability instead involves a coordinated escape from boredom into distraction, which is best provided by others with whom one can talk, drink, dance, smoke, and play cards. This means that sociability does not consist, as politics and morality do, in some form of radical reduction of human plurality. If the egoist is blind to the full reality of others and the compassionate person so metaphysically clear-sighted that the separation among beings disintegrates, socializing people seek out and value the presence of others *as others*, if only to forget or repress the emptiness of their own existence. The end point or ideal of sociability is a form of unity, namely, the smoothly adjusted, harmonious interaction among plural individuals. It is not the marginalization or annihilation of others for the benefit of the self (egoism) or the dissolution of both the self and other through identification (compassion).

Under the heading of sociability, then, Schopenhauer explored rather than bracketed the plurality and separateness of individuals. As we have seen, his observations about sociability are often critical and caustic;

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sociability is empty, deficient, degrading, and antithetical to thought. The world of spectacles, games, and consumption is very far from a utopia. Even so, the topic of sociability is structured differently from the ones of politics and morality. It prompted him to discuss the compatibility and incompatibility of human beings with one another, the similarities and dissimilarities among temperaments and characters, without questioning their realness or reducing their particularity. The dominant polarity is solitude and community, loneliness and togetherness. Even if Schopenhauer frequently concluded his reflections on sociable interaction by arguing for withdrawal over engagement and at times even praised misanthropy, the premise of sociability remains that other people *do* exist and that they are different from one another.

Harmony and Disharmony: Sociability and the Problem of Human Plurality

The theme of human variety appears in more than one area of Schopenhauer's thought. His discussions of philosophical achievement and moral excellence were shaped by observations of difference; there are, he insisted, profoundly consequential disparities of intelligence and moral worth in the human population. The premise of human difference also undergirds Schopenhauer's rejection of forms of political collectivism. Nationalism is a ridiculous ideology, he held, because large groups of individuals simply do not have very much in common just because they happen to live in the same region or speak the same language.[62] Yet his fullest exploration of human plurality nonetheless occurs under the heading of sociability because sociable interaction always involves a negotiation of human difference and likeness. Even though Schopenhauer noted that sociable interaction consists in a search for homogeneity and the lowest common denominator, it does so against the backdrop of undeniable heterogeneity, which must be continually managed. As Schleiermacher knew, the more diverse the socializing individuals are, the more strenuously they must search for some common ground.[63] The techniques of sociability enumerated by Schopenhauer – consuming spectacles together, consuming drinks together, playing games together, discussing news together – are geared toward finding or creating commonalities in groups, which typically means that aspects of human personalities must be deemphasized in the process. Sociability is the temporary *achievement* of convergence among diverse participants, an achievement that comes relatively easily for most people because of their already existing similarities, but is difficult, even

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painful for exceptional individuals, who must conceal their mental gifts. Schopenhauer's discussion of sociability is thus structured by his concern with what can be included and what must be excluded when humans seek common ground with one another. It is this pattern of inclusion and exclusion that makes the ostensibly trivial topic of sociability a medium for his reflections on humankind's variety.

To characterize the problem of heterogeneity in the realm of sociability, Schopenhauer frequently used musical metaphors. In a passage defending solitude, he suggested that one can only reach the most "perfect harmony" with oneself, because the differences among individualities never fail to generate "dissonance" (PP I: 370). Such dissonance can occur even among people who enjoy a great deal of agreement; as he noted in another passage, their varied moods in the moment can lead to "discord" among "harmonizing personalities" (PP I: 392). For Schopenhauer, even subtle and fleeting kinds of difference could become manifest as forms of disharmony. In general, however, people who are like each other and thus achieve a greater degree of "homogeneity" have more opportunity to enjoy their "perfect harmony" and "unison" (PP I: 391).

The imagery of harmony and dissonance is supposed to work as an argument for solitude. For those whose intelligence and rich inner life place them far above the level of the average sociable person, sociability entails friction and discordance. Yet Schopenhauer's invocations of harmony and consonance are not particularly damning and might even draw attention to the benefits of sociability: it is pleasing to participate in a harmonious convergence of personalities. In an extended metaphor, Schopenhauer likened the truly profound human being to a "virtuoso" who can perform a rich variety of musical pieces on his own and must appear as the lead performer whenever he is in the company of others (PP I: 372). Most people do not reach these heights of talent and skill, however, and can be compared to "horns" capable of one note only (PP I: 371). But Schopenhauer conceded that a group of horn blowers can perform a concert together in which each participant, no matter how "monotonous" in isolation, can nonetheless contribute to the musical whole by "sounding together at the right moment" (PP I: 371). Following the allegory, the sociable interaction of average individuals allows for an enjoyment that they cannot produce on their own. Schopenhauer's extended musical metaphors indicate that sociability is not the most appropriate medium for exceptional individuals, but these metaphors do not cast sociability as uniformly irritating or damaging; the sensation of agreement and harmonious reciprocity clearly has an appeal.

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The interconnected musical metaphors express Schopenhauer's ambiguous approach to sociability. Sociability in an environment of great cognitive disparity leads to severe irritations. This does not mean that all sociable interaction is pernicious; Schopenhauer understood the pleasures of like-mindedness. And he acknowledged that loneliness is a burden that even eminent minds "bemoan" and accept only as the "lesser of two evils" (PP I: 376): the "barrenness of solitude" is hard to endure (PP I: 378). Despite his criticism of sociability, he still coupled solitude and "desolation" (PP I: 370). To be sure, he believed that individuals who enjoy solitude and can bear long stretches of loneliness possess a key to happiness. Almost "all our suffering," he wrote in *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, "arises from society," because other people endanger our most precious possession, namely, our tranquil spirit (PP I: 373). To be unsociable is analogous to practicing "abstention"; it is wholesome for the spirit, just as dieting is wholesome for the body (PP I: 373). In a few moments, Schopenhauer even praised outright misanthropy.[64] While he did not explicitly identify himself as a misanthrope, he deemed hatred of humankind an understandable result of constant exposure to the "mad house" and "hostel for scoundrels" that is the world (BM: 193). Yet the misanthrope is, at least in Schopenhauer's reflections, paradoxically a *social* role, since the active, public rejection of humankind involves an audience-directed performance and thus presupposes the presence of observing others. Schopenhauer referred to the ancient anecdote in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* about "Myson the misanthrope," a figure so glad to be rid of humans that he laughed when alone rather than when in the company of others (PP II: 547). As the story makes clear, however, the misanthrope is nonetheless ready to explain his laughter to a curious questioner. In other words, he is not completely alone but performs and presents his embrace of loneliness publicly. The misanthrope likes to declare his exit from society to this society itself.

Schopenhauer seems to mount a defense of loneliness but conceded that it could feel barren even for those whose contact with society leaves them deeply disappointed. The dilemma of desolate loneliness versus disappointing togetherness requires a compromise. The individual who is repelled by society and yet finds long periods of loneliness unbearable must learn, Schopenhauer advised, to "carry a part of his loneliness with him in society" (PP I: 378). This involves not speaking one's mind openly and not taking what others say seriously. Schopenhauer called this compromise solution "restricted sociability" (PP I: 378). You enter society to

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alleviate your loneliness, but should only interact with it very cautiously and selectively; even when surrounded by others, you preserve some of your loneliness and remoteness, all for the sake of tranquility.

The process of determining the right distance from others is famously captured in Schopenhauer's parable of the porcupines, a piece of text in his oeuvre that almost qualifies as beloved:[65]

> On a cold winter's day a community of porcupines huddled very close together to protect themselves from freezing through their mutual warmth. However, they soon felt one another's quills, which then forced them apart. Now then the need for warmth brought them closer together again, that second drawback repeated itself so that they were tossed back and forth between both kinds of suffering until they discovered a moderate distance from one another, at which they could best endure the situation. – This is how the need for society, arising from the emptiness and monotony of our own inner selves, drives people together; but their numerous repulsive qualities and unbearable flaws push them apart again. The middle distance they finally discover and at which a coexistence is possible is courtesy and good manners. In England, anyone who does not stay at this distance is told: "Keep your distance!" – Of course by means of this the need for mutual warmth is only partially satisfied, but in exchange the prick of the quills is not felt. – Yet whoever has a lot of his own inner warmth prefers to stay away from society in order neither to cause trouble nor to receive it. (PP II: 584-5)

Just like the phrase "restricted sociability," the notion of "moderate distance" points to a compromise solution for humans repelled by different, even opposing kinds of suffering. It is hard to isolate yourself but equally hard to live with others, and so each person must identify a "middle" location that keeps the damage to a minimum. At the very end, the passage singles out a few happy souls who have an inner warmth and can depart from society altogether. But the qualification fails to persuade; it feels tacked on, an artificial addition that does not compellingly participate in the parable's neat set of analogies. The porcupines' longing for warmth corresponds to the yearning of humans for the distractions of company, and the porcupines' needles correspond to the flaws of other humans; the comment at the end about some form of "inner warmth" falls a little outside the structure of the fable and stands as a piece of wishful thinking. There is, it seems, no good solution other than balancing between two distinct misfortunes. The seductive and repellent qualities of human company are both ineliminable, and the pleasures of harmony and displeasures of dissonance require a "middle distance" among individuals in society.

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Schopenhauer's Projects of Mitigation

Sociability presented Schopenhauer with a dilemma. He could not quite reconcile the natural drive to sociability among humans with the equally natural uneven distribution of intelligence. If everyone satisfies the desire to socialize and enjoy the company of others, the gifted suffer from the dull-witted to whom they must adapt. Yet complete isolation from others is a preventative measure very few are willing to take, even among the most intelligent. The solution to the dilemma of sociability cannot be to let groups cluster on each rung of the ladder of mental ability, because there are so few exceptional individuals, lost in an ocean of mediocrities. If something must yield, it is the predilection for sociability among the very finest minds; they must learn to tolerate a great deal of loneliness. Yet Schopenhauer's preference for forms of "restricted sociability" (PP I: 378) or "conviviality . . . within certain restrictions" (PP II: 287) indicates that he conceded that complete and utter isolation was not an easy option, even for extraordinary minds.

The idea of restricted sociability shows again that Schopenhauer was often a thinker of mitigation rather than perfection. In his discussion of the state, Schopenhauer made it clear that political and legal structures of the state can contain and regulate the violent energy of near-universal egoism, but that they cannot eliminate it. The state embodies an acceptance of the world as it is – defective and deceptive – and arranges it in such a way as to neutralize the worst manifestations of the underlying pathology. It does little about the fundamental problem, namely, egoism. Likewise, the dilemma of sociability under conditions of intellectual disparity cannot be solved in a satisfying way. Gifted people can participate in collective performances of social harmony, but at the price of dumbing everything down and betraying themselves in the process. Or they can reject the disharmonies of interaction across divisions of intelligence, character, temperament, and mood, and withdraw from society entirely, but then they must bear the "desolation" of loneliness (PP I: 370).

The goal of politics is the regulation of ferocious egoists who treat each other as mere "phantoms," and the essence of morality resides in dissolving the "phantasm" of individuality. As Christopher Janaway puts it: in the sphere of politics, everyone else is mere resistance, a "not-I" that causes frustration and anger; in the sphere of morality, everyone else is "I once more," whose burdens are fully shared burdens.[66] Sociability, by contrast, is an arena of human togetherness and plurality among distinct and different selves who nonetheless share some traits and seek out each other

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as others for pleasure and distraction. Of course, Schopenhauer described sociability critically, as a problem: humankind's heterogeneity inevitably leads to social disharmony. Yet even in his characterization of disharmony, he implicitly admitted the fact of human heterogeneity and explored its consequences. The convergence of the many through a common theme or activity in the realm of sociability is always spurious and clearly non-metaphysical; the achieved identity consists of mere temporary likeness, does not rely on any virtue or insight, and emerges only by means of the suspension or suppression of differences. People who socialize act as if they share something or are alike, but they remain different.

Yet this also means that, in the domain of sociability, the fact of human plurality persists; it is not fully eliminated. Sociable groups are ultimately unable to incorporate everyone fully, and hence the homogeneity that they achieve is never entirely genuine or enduring. At the same time, the tendentially unsociable, the fine minds with pronounced hermit tendencies, are unable to remove themselves entirely from humankind and forget it completely, and hence their withdrawal, however serene, must still be seen as negative loneliness. In the end, neither the sociable nor the lonely achieve perfect closure. In this way, sociability and antisociability alike illuminate the stubborn, inescapable plurality of humankind.

Notes

1 The portrait of Johanna Schopenhauer's salon relies on Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, especially 43–55.
2 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 53.
3 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 52.
4 On famous guests in Johanna Schopenhauer's salon, see Safranski, *Schopenhauer*, 150; Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 46; Weber, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 18.
5 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 53.
6 Doris Maurer, *Das literarische Weimar – das literarische Bonn: Acht Porträts maßgeblicher Frauen* (Bonn: Bonner Verlags-Comptoir, 2019), 118.
7 Gert Sautermeister, "Reiseliteratur als Ausdruck der Epoche," in *Zwischen Revolution und Restauration 1815–1848: Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, vol. 5, ed. Gert Sautermeister and Ulrich Schmid (Munich: DTV, 1998), 116–50; 139–42.
8 Angela Linke, *Sprachkultur und Bürgertum: Zur Mentalitätsgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1996), 190.
9 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 47.
10 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 52. My translation.
11 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 73. My translation.

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12 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 127. My translation.
13 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 127. My translation.
14 Helmut Brandt, "Weimar: Wie die Deutschen zu ihrer literarischen Hauptstadt kamen," in *Stätten deutscher Literatur: Studien zur literarischen Zentrenbildung 1750–1815*, ed. Wolfgang Stellmacher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 351–91.
15 Weber, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 15.
16 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 12.
17 Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 1005.
18 Astrid Köhler, "Johanna Schopenhauer in London, Berlin und Weimar," in *Berlins 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Metropolen-Kompendium*, ed. Roland Berbig, Iwan-M. D'Aprile, Helmut Peitsch, and Erhard Schütz (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 75–86; 82.
19 Weber, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 17 and 18.
20 Robert Zimmer, "Baccalaureus und der Einzige. Schopenhauer und Goethe: Die Geschichte einer Begegnung," in *Schopenhauer und Goethe: Biographische und philosophische Perspektiven*, ed. Daniel Schubbe und Søren Fauth (Hamburg: Meiner, 2016), 29–58; 33.
21 Quoted in Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 19. My translation.
22 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 40.
23 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 73 and 190.
24 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 145.
25 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 190; Weber, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 16; Frost, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 96.
26 Frost, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 95–6.
27 Frost, *Johanna Schopenhauer*, 95.
28 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 104; Safranski, *Schopenhauer*, 150.
29 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 109.
30 Johanna Schopenhauer quoted in Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 108. As Angela Linke has shown, nineteenth-century books on manners stressed the need for a variety of topics and urged interlocutors not to be too thorough or didactic when chatting with others. See Linke, *Sprachkultur und Bürgertum*, 193.
31 Johanna Schopenhauer quoted in Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 108.
32 Houben, *Damals in Weimar*, 108.
33 Friedrich Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit: Deutsche Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Restauration und Revolution 1815–1848*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1971), 3.
34 Cartwright, *Schopenhauer*, 238.
35 Gwinner, *Schopenhauers Leben*, 102.
36 Gwinner, *Schopenhauers Leben*, 102.
37 Gwinner, *Schopenhauers Leben*, 184.
38 Hübscher, *Denker gegen den Strom*, 193.
39 Hübscher, *Denker gegen den Strom*, 193.
40 Rüdiger Safranski, *Goethe: Kunstwerk des Lebens. Biographie* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2013), 499.
41 Zimmer, "Schopenhauer und Goethe."

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42 H. A. Korff, *Geist der Goethezeit: Versuch einer ideellen Entwicklung der klassisch-romantischen Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1956), 528 and 532.
43 Gwinner *Arthur Schopenhauer aus persönlichem Umgang dargestellt*, 26 and 122. My translation.
44 Gwinner *Schopenhauer und seine Freunde,* 48. My translation.
45 Schopenhauer, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 476. My translation.
46 Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß,* vol. 4.2, 111. My translation.
47 Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß,* vol. 4.2, 117. My translation.
48 For an analysis of how Johanna Schopenhauer's salon and the various craft activities practiced by its members were "coded" as feminine, see Catriona MacLeod, "Cutting up the Salon: Adele Schopenhauer's 'Zwergenhochzeit' and Goethe's *Hochzeitlied*," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 89.1 (2015): 70–87; 74.
49 Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of the International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 23–4.
50 Gert Ueding, *Klassik und Romantik: Deutsche Literatur im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution 1789–1815: Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, vol. 4.1 (Munich: DTV, 1987), 103–16.
51 Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens (1799)," in *Schriften aus der Berliner Zeit 1796–1799*, ed. Günter Meckenstock (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984), 163–84.
52 Ulrike Wagner, "Schleiermacher's Geselligkeit, Henriette Herz, and the 'Convivial Turn,'" in *Conviviality at the Crossroads: The Poetics and Politics of Everyday Encounters*, ed. Oscar Hemer et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 65–87.
53 Beiser, *Weltschmerz*, 49.
54 Beiser, *Weltschmerz*, 49.
55 Some English commentators see "boredom" as a deceptively mild translation of the German *Langeweile*. See van der Lugt, *Dark Matters*, 344, and Young, *Schopenhauer*, 210.
56 For a discussion of Schopenhauer's conception of boredom in the European tradition of pessimism, see Dienstag, *Pessimism*, 31–2 and 98–100.
57 Joshua Isaac Fox, "Schopenhauer on Boredom," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 30.3 (2022): 477–95; 480.
58 For a detailed discussion of Schopenhauer's view of the US penitentiary system's use of boredom as punishment, see David Woods, "Seriously Bored: Schopenhauer on Solitary Confinement," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 27.5 (2019): 959–78; 959–62.
59 For the Romantic conception of sociability as a political ideal in the works of the conservative political thinker Adam Müller (1779–1829) and others, see Ueding, *Klassik und Romantik*, 106.
60 See Fox on boredom's relationship to a "will to cognize," that is, an interest in stimulation of otherwise unengaged mental faculties. Fox, "Schopenhauer on Boredom," 479.

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61 For a classic overview of the argument for honesty and sincerity, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2.
62 See Chapter 6 of this book.
63 Ethel Matala de Mazza, "Romantic Politics and Society," trans. Julia Ng and Ladislaus Löb, in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 191–207; 197.
64 Andrew Gibson and Ian James Kidd both categorize Schopenhauer as a misanthropic philosopher, but neither of them provides passages in which he explicitly identifies himself as a misanthrope. See Gibson, *Misanthropy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 99–110, and Kidd, "Philosophical Misanthropy," *Philosophy Now* (2017). https://philosophynow.org/issues/139/Philosophical_Misanthropy.
65 As mentioned above, the conservative thinker Michael Oakeshott turns to the parable of the porcupines to capture a tolerant mode of association that refrains from imposing substantive aims on its members. See Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 460. Yet the parable has had a career far outside philosophy. To mention one example, the therapist Deborah Lupenitz calls her compilations of psychological case studies *Schopenhauer's Porcupines: Intimacy and Its Dilemmas* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
66 Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Value," in *Better Consciousness: Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Value*, ed. Alex Neill and Christopher Janaway (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1–10; 9.

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