

Prudence in World Politics

J. Samuel Barkin, University of Massachusetts, Boston (Samuel.Barkin@umb.edu)
Stefano Guzzini, Uppsala University, PUC-Rio de Janeiro, DIIS (sgu@diis.dk)

The idea of prudence in world politics has had something of a resurgence among scholars of classical realism, constructivism, and philosophical pragmatism. The maxim of prudence appears as an important corrective in times of rising unilateralism and nationalism in foreign policy, but also as a potentially indispensable, because dialogical, tool when the rules of international society may need to be rewritten, including non-Western understandings and norms.

Yet, 'prudence' is easier invoked than defined or understood. This is not only due to terminological ambivalence, but to the quite diverse places it holds in our understanding of world politics. First, it does not follow the canon of knowledge in the social sciences, since it derives from an attempt to valorize practical knowledge. We see it referred to in the recent revival of *phronesis*, pragmatism, and the age-old normative question of the nature of (wise) politics. Second, it is a historically constituted maxim. Its evolution needs to be understood as a component of the ongoing socialization in world diplomatic culture and the very change of that culture in world politics. This socialization is informed by the 'lessons' of history, which are always contestable: which lessons and whose history? As such, the resurgence of prudence speaks to the recent revival of a different kind of diplomatic history (in practice theory), as well as the theoretical and empirical study of collective memory in world affairs. Finally, there have been attempts to delineate prudence (sometimes in the guise of 'self-restraint') as an explanatory factor in foreign policy analysis and the evolution of the international order.

Shedding light on the maxim of prudence in its normative, historical, practical and explanatory facets, and the links between them, is the aim of this workshop. It does not wish to explore prudence in yet another attempt to save contemporary realism. This would substantially narrow the scope of the workshop. Rather, it purports to find out whether, and if so how, this initially realist intuition can be fruitfully and coherently used, wherever this journey may lead us. Hence, the workshop brings together scholars from various research traditions within IR to conceptualize the common ground for discussions of prudence in IR theory, history, and practice.

Questions the workshop will explore include (but are not limited to):

- What is the relationship between prudence and *phronesis*, that is, the classic Greek understanding of wise practical action? What is its classical meaning? How has 'good judgement' been understood in the past and present? By whom?
- What is the classical realist tradition of 'prudence' in world politics? How diverse is it? Are there other inspirations of the diplomatic maxim of prudence?
- What, if any, are the historical paradigmatic cases of 'prudent' behaviour? Which behaviour's prudence is contested? What is the politics of the collective memory of prudence?
- What are the relationships among realist, constructivist, and pragmatist prudence? Do the different philosophical traditions yield compatible understandings of prudence at the level of policy?
- What could be the role of prudence as a practical maxim in a potentially more heterogeneous diplomatic culture? What are the conceptions of wise action in other diplomatic traditions? Is prudence the condition for dialogical politics, its content, or both?