

## Introduction

*We may say that the Eighteenth Century, notwithstanding all its Errors and Vices, has been, of all that are past, the most honourable to human Nature. Knowledge and Virtues were increased and diffused, Arts, Sciences, useful to Men, ameliorating their condition, were improved, more than in any former equal Period.*

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson,  
November 13, 1815

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BACKGROUND

The century that began with the peace of Utrecht in 1713 and ended with the Final Declaration of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 witnessed a dramatic transformation of the theoretical and practical understanding of politics in all of the major states of Europe and—by extension—America. The philosophy of the “Enlightenment”—the nebulous term used to describe a collection of writings and writers that dominated the intellectual life of the century—sought, with varying degrees of success, to understand and explain political behavior with scientific detachment and to prescribe an agenda for its improvement. Even the perennially skeptical Holbach acknowledged that the intellectual gains of the eighteenth century would define the course of European society for at least another hundred years.

Indeed, what Mirabeau and others called the “spirit of the age” was so profound that many political leaders—including some of the most reactionary and predatory princes of Europe—found it to their advan-

tage to at least claim fidelity to its doctrines. From the time of the War of the Spanish Succession European diplomats made a point of inserting references to “rational” and “enlightened” principles in official documents even though, as Vergennes later needlessly observed, they lacked concrete meaning. Frederick II of Prussia typified this opportunistic dimension of *ancien regime* diplomacy: in October 1740 he published his famous *Anti-Machiavel*, in which he bitterly castigated *raison d’etat*, but barely two months later he seized the Habsburg province of Silesia in a brutal display of power politics. To be sure, *Realpolitik* was far from dead in eighteenth century Europe, and the best intentions of the *philosophes* could not, as Clausewitz would later observe, make two and two equal five.

Nevertheless there were many statesmen and sovereigns in eighteenth century Europe and America who shared in, and indeed helped to promote, the cause of “enlightenment” and political rationalism. The “enlightened despots” of Europe as well as republicans in the Dutch Republic, Sweden, and America all attempted dramatic reformations of the established political orders of their states. Kaiser Leopold II of Austria actually sought to reduce the powers of his office, a rare and noteworthy goal indeed in an absolute monarchy, and his philosophical dispositions to constitutionalism served as a precedent for Metternich’s attempts to reshape the political system of Austria two decades later. Throughout Europe ideas that had been confined to the *salons* since the late seventeenth century found their way—albeit in a sporadic and filtered manner—into the affairs of state. D’Argenson, Turgot, and Necker in France, Peter I, Catherine II, and Speranskii in Russia, Frederick II and Stein in Prussia, Kaunitz and Leopold II in Austria, and Bolingbroke and Fox in Britain all sought to use the scientific and philosophical innovations of the eighteenth century as a guide in the political arena. In some cases, such as in Frederick’s Prussia and Catherinian Russia, wide-ranging reforms were accomplished as a result, while in Bourbon France the calls for change and restructuring were blithely ignored, an irony indeed in the state that had produced more “enlightened” philosophers, beginning with Descartes, than all the other states of Europe combined.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of and belief in an enlightened age were prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic. American political leaders were as learned in the advances of science and political philosophy as their European counter-

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<sup>1</sup> See Stuart Andrews, *Enlightened Despotism*, [New York: 1968]; and John Gagliardo, *Enlightened Despotism*, [New York: 1967].

parts, and yet were mindful of the dangers existing in the competitive and predatory universe of eighteenth century politics. It is a central premise of this work that Europe and America formed an interconnected state system in the period between the Seven Years' War and the Congress of Vienna. This relationship, a product of the colonial struggles between Britain and France in the mid-eighteenth century, grew to maturity during the Napoleonic period and became a decisive condition and doctrine of early American foreign policy. American leaders conceived of world politics largely in terms of a "balance" between the maritime powers of Britain, France, and their nation and of a natural and permanent relationship between America and Europe which—despite occasional outbursts from isolationists—was not likely to disappear. For this reason I have chosen to examine the political permutations and implications of Enlightenment ideas in Europe and America "simultaneously", as it were, by concentrating on the philosophy and politics of representative statesmen from both continents: Thomas Jefferson of the United States and Prince Clemens von Metternich of Austria.

### WHY METTERNICH AND JEFFERSON?

The purpose of this study is to examine to what extent the philosophical program of the Enlightenment informed the policies of these two pivotal statesmen of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe and America. While this necessitates a thorough discussion of specific theorists and their ideas, it is not essential, or possible, to offer a comprehensive interpretation or overview of the Enlightenment within the pages of this book. For our purposes it is adequate to employ the serviceable definition of "Enlightenment" philosophy supplied by Henry May. While acknowledging the manifold nuances and refinements of eighteenth century political thought, May distills its arguments to two main premises: first, that all "Enlightenment" philosophers shared a belief that their age was more advanced than any which had preceded it, and secondly that the affairs of the political and physical worlds were best understood, explained, and guided by rational analytical processes based on universal laws and a cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>2</sup> This, therefore, will be the parsimonious definition of "Enlightenment" I will employ in general terms and usage throughout the study. Specific ideas

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<sup>2</sup> Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America*, p. xiv.

and contributions will be examined, explored, and critiqued in the context of the analyses of Metternich's and Jefferson's thought. Moreover, it is critical to note that I seek to explain Metternich and Jefferson as *products* of the eighteenth century, and not *precursors* of the twentieth, as has unfortunately become commonplace, especially in the political science literature. Understanding Metternich and Jefferson in the context of the Enlightenment will be my point of departure and ultimate standard of comparison in assessing their statecraft.

The thesis of this work is straightforward: that Metternich's statecraft represented an attempt to apply Enlightenment—in his case, mainly Kantian—ideas to the internal and external workings of government, while Jefferson rejected the prescriptive value of these teachings and based his statecraft on an opportunistic pursuit of self-interest and a conservative devotion to custom and tradition. The ideas of the Enlightenment were prescriptive to the idealistic Metternich; they were at best justificatory for the more pragmatic Jefferson. The familiar “received” versions of these statesmen are, I contend, a product of late nineteenth century nationalist historiography, which denounced Metternich's liberal cosmopolitanism and exalted Jefferson's “patriotic” role as a “founding father” and source of American national identity. These interpretations have endured for so long because few historians or political scientists have found it necessary, worthwhile, or proper to challenge them. In the public mind Metternich is known more for his skills at political intrigue than his political philosophy, while Jefferson is commonly regarded as a “philosopher” and exemplar of an American “ideal” by scholars equally uninterested in the pragmatic and cynical nature of his diplomatic initiatives.

For this reason Metternich and Jefferson emerge as obvious candidates for such a comparative study. Both were learned students of eighteenth century philosophy who claimed to base their policies on “rational” and enlightened formulas. Both were dominant influences in the political processes of their respective states for close to forty years, and can arguably have been said to have defined their eras. Consequently the relationship between theory and practice in their political behavior can be assessed in a wide array of domestic and international circumstances. Both had the political power to act on the convictions they claimed informed their statecraft, and both left behind an ambitious—and ambiguous—legacy that pays further investigation. Moreover, Metternich and Jefferson bequeathed an enormous trove of documents for scholarly inspection: the volume of their personal papers almost defies categorization. Metternich's loquacity in discussing his ideas on

almost every subject imaginable was well-known (and taxing) among his colleagues, and it was noted that he often spent eight hours a day at his writing desk. Jefferson, for his part, drafted so many letters to such a variety of correspondents that John Adams observed with a tinge of sarcasm that “Your stationary bill alone for paper, Quills, Ink, Wafers, Wax, Sand, and Pounce must have amounted to enough to maintain a small family”.<sup>5</sup> This continuous stream of comments on the affairs of state, which was matched by few of their contemporaries and exceeded by none—provide an unusually well-informed lens through which to view the political thinking and process of these archetypical representatives of the political Enlightenment. In the final analysis, both Metternich and Jefferson declared apostolic devotion to Enlightenment thought: my task has been to assess the validity of their claims by examining their “declared” political views and seeing what they did with them in practice.

## METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

To accomplish this task it is necessary to unite, in so far as is possible, the fields of political philosophy and political and diplomatic history. I attempt to strike a balance between theory and practice by assiduously exploiting the primary sources and placing them at the service of a broader theoretical and interpretive argument. I devote six chapters to each statesman: an introductory and concluding assessment in which the argument on each figure will be presented and summarized, and two each on internal and international politics. Following these discussions a broader concluding chapter will explore the similarities and differences in Metternich’s and Jefferson’s thought and relate them to the historiographic record as well as the broader context of Enlightenment thought. Naturally selectivity has been an omnipresent and powerful concern; this is not a narrative history or intellectual biography and does not pretend to offer an exhaustive recitation of Metternich’s and Jefferson’s accomplishments while in power. My focus has been on steering between the Scylla of over-generalized theory and the Charybdis of detailed, but largely unexplained, historical narration.

For this reason I have chosen to explore several critical aspects of their statecraft and assess the relationship between their ideas and their

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<sup>5</sup> JA to TJ, July 12, 1822, Cappon, p. 582.

diplomatic and political conduct within the context of these “case studies”. Moreover, I have chosen to devote equal weight to their internal as well as external policies in order to make the study more comprehensive and to examine the relationship of foreign and domestic politics in their thought. It is to be anticipated that this methodology will produce some criticisms, most focusing on why certain ideas or policies were discussed while others were given lesser priority. My steady answer to such inquiries is that at all times I have attempted to keep the *comparative* nature and purpose of this study in mind when choosing and offering my assessments of the relationship of theory and practice in their statecraft.

I have chosen to rely chiefly upon primary sources in order to allow Metternich and Jefferson to speak for themselves. The published editions of Metternich’s and Jefferson’s papers are more than adequate for the purposes of this study, and it has not been necessary to do archival research except in a few instances noted in the text. One of the most conspicuous problems I encountered was that the literature on Jefferson and early American politics is considerably more extensive than studies of Metternich, and thus it has been necessary to treat the massive glacial of Jefferson literature judiciously in order to preserve a rough equilibrium in the analysis.

I have also sought to maintain an equilibrium—if the use of that term may be pardoned—between historical and theoretical literature. The role of the latter is less overt than direct primary source citations, but its influence can be clearly seen in the structure and presentation of the argument. It is not my intention to construct a detailed exegesis of Metternich’s or Jefferson’s treatment of this or that area of policy, or to present a formal theoretical “model” that leaves no room for historical examples or contextual analysis. My “synthesis”, if it can be called that, of these approaches has been tediously difficult to construct and may appear at times overly cautious, but the methodology has been chosen as the best practical means of expressing the comparison and placing ideas in their proper context. Naturally some will view this approach as a shoddy compromise or, at worst, a *melange* of two perfectly viable disciplines, but I have selected it because it suits the nature of the period as well as the statesmen themselves, who always at least talked about keeping theory and practice in harmony.

## List of Abbreviations Used in the Notes

Due to constraints of space as well as the multiplicity of sources used in this study, I have attempted to simplify the citations as much as possible. The following is a table of initialized citations to identify frequently used names or references:

### I. PERSONS

JA	John Adams	KF	Kaiser Franz II of Austria
AG	Albert Gallatin	JM	James Madison
AH	Alexander Hamilton	CM	Clemens von Metternich
TJ	Thomas Jefferson	GW	George Washington

### II. SOURCES

Adams, *History*: Henry Adams, *History of the United States During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (9 vols.) [New York: 1889-1892].

Boyd: Julian P. Boyd, et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, [Princeton: 1950-].

Cappon: Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, [Chapel Hill: 1987].

*Extracts*: Dickinson W. Adams, ed., *Jefferson's Extracts From the Gospels*, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Second Series, [Princeton: 1983].

Federalist: Isaac Kramnick, ed., *The Federalist Papers*, [New York: 1987].

- Ford: Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Federal Edition (12 vols.), [New York: 1905]. The Federal Edition is in 12 volumes, while the standard Ford edition contains 10. This accounts for any discrepancies in citation between the two. The text of letters contained in both volumes are identical.
- JPLC: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Microfilm edition of the collection housed in the Library of Congress.
- Kraehe, MGP I/II: Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, vol. I: *The Contest With Napoleon, 1799-1814*, [Princeton: 1963]; vol. II: *The Congress of Vienna, 1814-1815*, [Princeton: 1983].
- L&B: A.A. Lipscomb and A.E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (20 vols.), [Washington, D.C.: 1903-1904].
- MM: *The Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, ed. by Prince Richard Metternich and translated by Mrs. Alexander Napier (5 vols.), [New York: 1880-1882]. The first five volumes of the *Nachgelassenen Papieren* translated into English.
- Malone: Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time* (6 vols.) [New York: 1948-1981].
- Notes: Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), ed. by William Peden, [Chapel Hill: 1954].
- NP: *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren* (8 vols.), ed. by Prince Richard Metternich, [Vienna: 1880-1884].
- PJM: *The Papers of James Madison* (17 vols.), ed. J.C.A. Stagg, et al., [Chicago and Charlottesville: 1962-1991]; PJMPS: *The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series*; PJMSS: *The Papers of James Madison: Secretary of State Series*.
- PT]RS: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney, et.al, [Princeton: 2004-]
- Srbik, *Metternich*: Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Metternich: Der Staatsmann und der Mensch* (3 vols.), [Munich and Vienna: 1925-1954].
- Syrett: Harold C. Syrett et al., eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (26 vols.), [New York: 1961-1991].
- WMQ: The William and Mary Quarterly.

## Acknowledgements

I have lived with this book, which began its life as my doctoral dissertation at the University of Virginia in the early 1990s, for nearly twenty years. As it has matured over time, it has undergone significant changes and its key arguments have been presented, tested, and evaluated by colleagues in both Europe and the United States in print, symposia, and conferences. What appears here is a significantly more svelte, yet I hope more theoretically and structurally taut, text than the one with which I began many years ago.

Though I had originally intended to publish the work after completing the Ph.D., it only now appears in print. Its significant length, even after substantive pruning, as well as its straddling of two distinct bodies of literature, made it a curious undertaking for university presses and a difficult project to ‘fit’ in increasingly specialized American academic markets. Sections of the argument appeared as components of articles and conference papers over the years. Unsure of the future for the comprehensive book, however, I moved on to new projects and personal and professional responsibilities that took me away from this comparative study for the better part of a decade.

The project owes its revival to the helpful suggestions of two dear friends and colleagues—Sandra Rebok of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and Andrew J. O’Shaughnessy, Saunders Director of the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello. Both warmly encouraged me to revisit the text following a conference at Salzburg in 2005 and have been steadfast in their attentiveness both to me and to my comparative analysis of Metternich and Jefferson. Approaching the text with a fresh perspective and with ten years of professional scholarship under my belt, I emerged with a transformed book, and it owes its revision—and publication at CSIC—to the

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tion in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Stanley Michalak, Professor Emeritus of Government at Franklin and Marshall, has been my mentor and adviser since my earliest undergraduate days a quarter-century ago and he helped shape the comparative approach of this study from its inception. Robert P. Andes, one of my earliest teachers, had a less direct influence on this study but a formative and lasting impact in a much earlier and uncertain stage of my intellectual development. No scholar could stand on the shoulders of stronger teachers than these, though I do not feel remotely equal to their example.

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James R. Sofka