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Abstract

As one of the most prolific and influential statesmen of the nineteenth century, Prince Clemens von Metternich is a man whose politics, policies, and political philosophy has received a good amount of attention from historians. Owing to the focus on his career rather than his personal story, the details of his early life have often gone unanalyzed in the context of his later views, despite the formative influence of these years on his political philosophy. An upbringing culturally influenced by France, an education focused on natural sciences and history, and a first-hand experience with the worst side of the French Revolution serve as the origins of key Metternichian principles, such as the balance of power, the legitimacy of monarchs, and conservative opposition to revolution, can be tracked to Metternich's early life. Thus, in order to fully understand Metternich's motives as a politician and diplomat, one must understand his background and early life.

Keywords

Prince Clemens von Metternich, Austrian Empire, French Revolution

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A Timeline of Key Events in Metternich's Early Life

1773: Metternich born in Coblenz, the Archbishopric of Trier, to Francis George and Maria Beatrice von Metternich.

1786: Friedrich Simon becomes his private tutor.

1788: Enrollment at Strasbourg University until 1790; Studies under Koch.

1789: Outbreak of revolution in France; Looting of Strasbourg by revolutionaries; Refugee French aristocrats take up residence in Coblenz and the surrounding Rhineland.

1790: Coronation of Emperor Francis II; Enrollment at Mainz University until 1793; Studies under Vogt.

1792: Coronation of Emperor Leopold II; Prussian army in Coblenz; Prussia army defeated at Valmy.

1793: Fall of Mainz; Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette executed in France; Beginning of the Reign of Terror; Metternich to Brussels; Capture of Valenciennes.

1794: Mission to Great Britain; Fall of the Austrian Netherlands; Fall of Coblenz; Relocation to Vienna.

The nineteenth century in Europe was a period defined politically by competing empires and revolutions of political thought, characterized by brilliant statesmen whose influence could be felt across the continent and changed the course of nations. One of these statesmen was Prince Clemens von Metternich, who the historical record remembers as one of the Austrian Empire's greatest diplomats and one of Europe's most infamous archconservatives. Fulfilling both of these roles, Metternich is the man most frequently viewed as the chief facilitator of the Concert of Europe – the system of international cooperation and negotiation following the Napoleonic wars designed to maintain the European balance of power and to uphold the integrity of the continent's monarchies. These principles defined his nearly fifty-years of policy making. Having entered Austria's diplomatic

service as a young man at the dawn of the century, he quickly made a name for himself during the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars due to his central role at the 1815 Congress of Vienna, where he helped redraw the borders of Europe and re-establish the old monarchical order. Throughout his long career, he established himself as a committed opponent of revolutionary activity, liberalism, and nationalism, always working to maintain the strength of Europe's traditional empires – especially in his adopted home of Austria. His career concluded in 1848 when Austria, like Europe as a whole, faced liberal uprisings on a scale which could only barely be contained, signaling the end of Metternich's age of conservatism.

Despite his illustrious career, under no circumstances did Metternich simply spring from the ground, destined to guide the progression of history. He was instead entirely the product of his society. His family was one of prosperous Rhenish nobles well-integrated into the imperial mechanisms of the Holy Roman Empire and strongly influenced by aristocratic French culture. His education focused on history and science, and occurred concurrently with the French Revolution, the excesses of which Metternich bore witness to on more than one occasion. Most Metternich biographers pay little attention to these formative years, instead spending far more time studying the man that he would become and his political legacy. This, however, minimizes the importance of a crucial stage of development in humans: the early

and formative years, in which frequently lie the seeds of future actions. A study of Metternich's background and early life can help to explain the development of his later philosophies as natural developments of the cultural, intellectual, and political forces which surrounded him.

To understand how exactly the past defines the future, however, a firm grip must be held on what exactly the future entails, or in this case, Metternich's political philosophy. With broad strokes, his doctrines can be divided into three key principles: the balance of power, legitimacy, and conservatism, each one explaining and reinforcing the others. Self-evident as per its label, the balance of power principle dictates the need for a political and military equilibrium among between European nations, designed to prevent the domination of any single state over any other. The desire to conquer and rule Europe as a hegemon was a very real ambition for European leaders prior to the Congress of Vienna. Wars of containment had been fought against rising powers for centuries: first against the Habsburg dynasty in the Thirty Years' War, then against Louis XIV's France, and finally against Napoleon. According to Henry Kissinger, "[The balance-of-power system] was meant to limit both the ability of states to dominate others and the scope of conflicts. Its goal was not peace so much as stability and

moderation.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, this was Metternich’s goal, as not only would a non-Austrian hegemon naturally rival his empire, but war, as he saw it, was uncontrollable. He expounded on this point in 1821, writing that “once it [had] begun laws are no longer imposed by the will of man but by force of circumstance.”⁷⁵ A balance of power thus kept wars in Europe under control and maintained societal stability, avoiding the catastrophic situations which had characterized the past two-hundred years.

Rounding that principle out are the principles of legitimacy and conservatism, which can be seen as nearly inseparable. The first demands support for the monarchical regimes of Europe, no matter the circumstances. The second opposes sweeping liberal political reform in the style that the French Revolution had aimed for. According to Metternich, monarchy was the very symbol of law and order in Europe from which all laws emanated. As such, he believed in supporting them not because of a divine right, but because failing to do so would undermine the entire continent’s social order, leading to chaos. Revolutionaries and reformers that would severely limit the power of monarchs or overthrow them altogether were thus to be rigorously opposed by all European states for that very reason. If revolution seized control of a monarchical state, then European monarchs were to intervene to

⁷⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 18, 57-59, 70-72, 75-77.

⁷⁵ G. de Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich and his Times* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1962), 69.

restore order, as a protection of their very own legitimacy.⁷⁶ Thus, the three principles of Metternich's philosophy were rooted in the fundamentally pragmatic goal of maintaining the rule of law and keeping Europe generally in order by maintaining both international and domestic stasis.

Historians disagree on how these principles and motivations reflect upon his personal character, though undertaking research on Metternich's life and philosophy in the English language is a problematic task. Several influential studies of his life and character, such as Heinrich Ritter von Srbik's 1925 biographical masterpiece *Metternich der Staatsmann und der Mensch*, remain untranslated from their original language. Additionally, while Richard von Metternich's *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, a compilation of his father's uncompleted autobiography and letters remains a valuable first-hand account of the statesman's life, it is by no means a complete collection of Metternich sources, with numerous letters and documents remaining untranslated. Commenting on this situation, French biographer Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny remarked that "the historiography on Metternich in English is markedly less plentiful than that in French and still less than that in German. The English edition of the *Memoires et Documents* of the prince de Metternich

⁷⁶ E. L. Woodward, *Three Studies in European Conservatism: Metternich, Guizot, the Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963), 39-41.

is only half the size of the German and French editions.”⁷⁷ While much English biography has emerged utilizing superior French and German resources, until greater interest is taken in translating the entire collection of Metternich documents from their native languages, scholarship on him which relies solely on English sources will lack the full breadth of resources that could be available. Such is the predicament faced by this very study of Metternich’s early life—though not one which will diminish the validity of the conclusions drawn through available resources. Generally, English sources can be divided into three broad categories: those written before the First World War, those written in the interwar period, and those written following the Second World War, which reflect the changing views of Metternich’s character over time.

Published in 1888, Colonel George Bruce Malleeson’s *Life of Prince Metternich* was one of the earliest Metternich biographies available in English. Written only eight years after Richard von Metternich’s published his *Memoirs*, Malleeson’s biography relied heavily on it as a resource. In many places, he simply rephrased and restated the account of Metternich’s early life as recorded within the *Memoirs*, making little effort to analyze the events of that period.⁷⁸ The later biographer G. A. C.

⁷⁷ de Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich and his Times*, xi.

⁷⁸ G. B. Malleeson, *Life of Prince Metternich* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1888), 4-14.

Sandeman wrote little more on the subject, despite the greater length of his text overall.⁷⁹ Both ultimately shared the same eventual conclusion on Metternich as well: that he was a deeply flawed individual with an overall negative impact on European history. For his part, Malleon portrayed Metternich as the architect of “velvet-gloved despotism,” who single-handedly kept nationalism subdued for decades. Sandeman, however, took the opposite stance, arguing that Metternich in fact was little more than a political opportunist whose success entirely rested upon his personal charm rather than on any concrete political ideology, and thus to see him as a Machiavellian schemer is foolish.⁸⁰ As pre-war authors, both Malleon and Sandeman were emblematic of the hostility still maintained toward Metternich on principle. Liberalism and nationalism were the popular ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and thus very few had any desire to give serious consideration to the ultimate opponent of both.⁸¹ It thus seems reasonable to conclude that both authors were deeply influenced by this universal hostility, finding little value in understanding the development of a man whom they only saw in a negative fashion.

With the First World War, however, came a reassessment of Metternich. Many viewed the war’s destruction as a product of

⁷⁹ G. A. C. Sandeman, *Metternich* (London: Methuen & Co. LTD., 1911), 12-26.

⁸⁰ Malleon, *Life of Prince Metternich*, 1-3; Sandeman, *Metternich*, 335-346.

⁸¹ Enno E. Kraehe, ed, *The Metternich Controversy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 2.

nationalistic thought. With alternatives to liberalism concurrently growing in popularity, Metternich's legacy and character began to be looked at differently. Nostalgia for the peaceful days of the Concert of Europe almost seemed to be propagated, inverting the old negative views, as this was the period in which von Srbik's 1925 biography became the most radically revisionist and positive view of Metternich since his death. In it, von Srbik discarded the old characterizations and portrayed Metternich as a brilliant and coherent statesman worthy of respect.⁸² In English, Algernon Cecil followed von Srbik's lead, and while he gave a much more positive treatment than previous authors, he was once more not one who possessed a highly insightful view into Metternich's formative years, going little further than imaginative and unresolved speculation on the effect they may have had on the statesman. Perhaps the currents of revisionism went too far, with historians of this time now too interested in praising Metternich's supposed genius rather than determining from whence it came. Still, interwar historians were able to break the stigma surrounding his legacy, allowing future historians to study him seriously, rather than writing him off as a dead and buried political boogeyman.⁸³

It is perhaps only since the Second World War that historians have regarded Metternich more objectively rather than

⁸² Ibid, 2.

⁸³ Algernon Cecil, *Metternich 1773-1859: A Study of his Period and Personality* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 11-22.

through lenses tinted by political dispute. The year 1959 marked the one-hundredth anniversary of Metternich's death, yet not a single one of the Empires that he had tried to balance remained, with imperialism grossly out of style. These developments reflected how far the world had come since the days of Metternich and benefited historians detaching themselves personally from the statesman's ideas without the clouding effects of national pride or political grudges. In 1952, Constantin de Grunwald seriously questioned the role of Metternich's teachers on his political development, delving into details on their scholarly specialties from the *Memoirs* that previous biographers had virtually ignored.⁸⁴ Much later, in 1991, Desmond Seward paid deep attention to Metternich's often glossed-over early career as an assistant to his father, the imperial envoy to the Austrian Netherlands, and that experience's effect on his own career.⁸⁵ Even earlier, and perhaps at long last, Alan Palmer's 1972 biography had finally come to admit the need to understand Metternich's early life on a more than superficial level in order to fully understand the man that he would become.⁸⁶ Furthermore, all three authors offered nuanced analyses of his character that captured both the good and the bad inherent in a man as dynamic as Metternich had been, demonstrating a level of biographical

⁸⁴ Constantin de Grunwald, *Metternich* (London: The Falcon Press, 1953), 7-17.

⁸⁵ Desmond Seward, *Metternich: The First European* (New York: Viking, 1991), 9-19.

⁸⁶ Alan Palmer, *Metternich* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 4-24.

sophistication that is perhaps only obtainable with sufficient temporal distance from the subject, especially with one so controversial. As such, it is these modern biographies that are most useful in understanding the early life of Metternich, and whose even-handed, honest, and detailed investigation of their subject is best followed in future studies such as this.

Ultimately, all Metternich biographers must start at the very beginning, whether they delve deeply into the implications of it or not: the circumstances of his birth. Metternich was born in the Rhenish city of Coblenz on 15 May, 1773, to Francis George von Metternich and his wife, Maria Beatrice von Kageneck.⁸⁷ At this time, Francis was a highly active diplomat in the service of various Holy Roman states and their Habsburg overlords, holding, at various points in his life, titles such as chamberlain to both the Archbishops of Trier and Mainz, minister at the imperial court, and imperial ambassador to the Rhenish electorates and Austrian Netherlands.⁸⁸ Time spent in the Austrian capital of Vienna as a young man in the 1760s had won him the attention of both the legendary state chancellor Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz as well as the Empress Maria Theresa. The two ultimately helped negotiate his marriage to Maria Beatrice, a vivacious noblewoman in the Empress's favor who hailed from Austria-controlled Bohemia.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁸ Sandeman, *Metternich*, 9.

⁸⁹ Palmer, *Metternich*, 7-8.

The Metternichs themselves were, by this point, already a distinguished family, having produced several archbishops of both Mainz, where the Counts von Metternich had traditionally served as hereditary chamberlain, and Trier, under whose authority the family estate at Coblenz lay. As Mainz and Trier were members of the imperial electorate well connected to the Austrian hegemony, the Metternichs' own connections to them ensured they remained a relevant, if minor, family.⁹⁰ By Metternich's own words, it was the courtly machinations of both his parents which led to his engagement to his first wife, Eleonore von Kaunitz, the granddaughter of the state chancellor.⁹¹

Despite ending his career in professional disgrace due to his untimely oversight of the Austrian Netherlands at the time of their fall to revolutionary French forces, Francis von Metternich left a profound legacy on his son. Cynically dismissive of the revolutionary political upheaval of the time, he maintained the firm belief that "this business will work out one way or another, like everything else," a phrase which Metternich himself could have uttered in reference to revolution and his unshakable faith in the authority of monarchy. Francis won the trust of the Habsburg emperors with his honesty and loyalty, securing his family's position in their favor even after the destruction of his diplomatic

⁹⁰ Sandeman *Metternich*, 4-9.

⁹¹ Clemens Wenzel Lothar, Fürst von Metternich, *Memoirs of Prince Metternich: 1773-1835*, vol. 1, ed. Richard von Metternich (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1880), 21-22.

career.⁹² While physically described as being “as heavily German as the Hanoverian Georges,” by Palmer, it seems more fair to borrow a phrase from Cecil, that “not the light beer of Vienna but the sparkling wine of the Rhineland ran in the veins of the Metternichs,” upon reflecting on his personal behavior.⁹³ Francis was a figure emblematic of the “French social life and moral laxity which characterized the smaller German States,” in Metternich’s own words.⁹⁴ The phrases stately, prim, pleasure-loving, frivolous, and spend-thrift have all been used to describe the elder Metternich, and conjure images strikingly similar to those associated with the French aristocrats themselves on the eve of the Revolution. His amiable dismissiveness of revolutionary forces only completes the comparison.⁹⁵ Maria Beatrice, while hailing from the east of the imperial lands, helped enforce these French overtones. Profoundly ambitious, she piled her affections and attention onto young Clemens, raising him to become a master of “the art of pleasing,” the French language, and “the graces which the old society of France and the parts of Europe adjacent had brought to perfection.”⁹⁶ He was the child upon which the family’s hopes were poured, and so he was to perfect the traits which had

⁹² de Grunwald, *Metternich*, 11; Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich’s German Policy, vol. 1: The Contest with Napoleon, 1799-1814* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13-14.

⁹³ Palmer, *Metternich*, 7; Cecil, *Metternich 1773-1859*, 11.

⁹⁴ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 3.

⁹⁵ Sandeman, *Metternich*, 9.

⁹⁶ de Grunwald, *Metternich*, 12; Cecil, *Metternich 1773-1859*, 12.

brought his parents success. These are the very traits which brought him diplomatic success later in life.

Certainly, surrounded as he was by Rhenish society, Metternich's development as a charming aristocrat in the French style was to be expected. In 1773, the Elector and Archbishop of Trier, Clemens Wenzeslaus was both the uncle of King Louis XVI of France and the man for whom Metternich would be named. His appointment as archbishop was designed to solidify the new alliance between the French Bourbons and Austrian Habsburgs.⁹⁷ At this time, however, Trier was more commonly known by its French name of Treves—strongly telling of where the archbishopric leaned culturally.⁹⁸ “Cosmopolitanism,” states modern Rhineland expert Michael Rowe, “acted as an antidote to the stifling localism and bigotry” of the region,” where there was a craving for news on foreign improvements which might be applied locally,” where there was perhaps no more cosmopolitan state than nearby France. France's influence was felt in numerous tangible fields, such as the adoption of French economic practices, social club structure, and political and social journals.⁹⁹ The Rhineland thus served as a veritable melting pot of German and French influences, politically tied to Germany and the Habsburgs, but with

⁹⁷ Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13-14; Palmer, *Metternich*, 6.

⁹⁸ Palmer, *Metternich*, 7.

⁹⁹ Rowe, *From Reich to State*, 18, 24.

its heart held by France, a description which fits Metternich just as well as the region itself. That Metternich became such a staunch enemy to the Revolution is then entirely unsurprising, for the goals of the Revolution called for the destruction of this courtly culture which he had grown up with. One could ascribe Metternich's philosophical development to a visceral self-defense of his way of life, and while that may be sufficient explanation if one is to assume that he was motivated entirely by personal reasons, it seems unable to completely account for the consistency of Metternich's principles and the question of why they formed specifically as they did. To find the answer to that, one must turn to a new facet of Metternich's early development: his education.

Metternich's education, while rarely commented on by the man himself, was incredibly diverse. Befitting his status as a nobleman in the Rhineland region, which boasted the highest literacy in Europe during the late eighteenth century and served as a center of the Catholic Enlightenment, he received comprehensive instruction from several tutors and leading universities.¹⁰⁰ Among his tutors, whom Metternich pays special attention to in his *Memoir*, was Friedrich Simon, a disciple of the educators Johann Bernhard Basedow and Joachim Heinrich Campe, pioneers of the philanthropist school of education that was "in vogue" at the time of Metternich's childhood.¹⁰¹ Philanthropinism called for a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 23-27.

¹⁰¹ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 3-4.

“natural” education, where children were to be engaged as children rather than small adults, with emphasis placed on the teaching of “natural” subjects, such as chemistry, natural science, history, and commerce.¹⁰² After joining Simon in his native city of Strasbourg in 1788, two years into his tutelage, Metternich’s education was supplemented by lectures from the city’s university.¹⁰³ It is here that he received instruction from a man only recorded today as “Professor Koch,” a lecturer on German law who specialized in the study of the Treaty of Westphalia.¹⁰⁴ Attendance at the University of Mainz¹⁰⁵ later in his life brought him to study under Nicolas Vogt, the official historian of the Empire, who became one of Metternich’s “most zealous friends.”¹⁰⁶ In lectures inspired by philosophers such as Leibniz, Wolff, and Vattel, Vogt argued that the “greatest goal of a truly enlightened society is the education of all men as to the importance of the maintenance of [the] balance among both nations and individuals,” language later found in Metternich’s own ideas.¹⁰⁷ The scientific studies Metternich likely received from Simon never left him: as late as 1796, Metternich

¹⁰² Frank Pierrepont Graves, *Great Educators of Three Centuries: Their Work and its Influence on Modern Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 116-118.

¹⁰³ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, *Metternich*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Fittingly translated as its French name, “Mayence,” in modern editions of the *Memoir*.

¹⁰⁶ de Grunwald, *Metternich*, 13; von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 11.

¹⁰⁷ James R. Sofka, *Metternich, Jefferson, and the Enlightenment: Statecraft and Political Theory in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 2011), 28.

firmly believed that his “particular vocation seemed to me to be the cultivation of knowledge, especially of the exact and physical Sciences, which suited my taste particularly... The diplomatic career might certainly flatter my ambition, but during all my life I have never been accessible to this feeling.” “Man and his life seemed to me to be objects worthy of study,” he went on to write in reference to his diligent attendance of lectures on geology, chemistry, physics, and medicine in Vienna in 1797.¹⁰⁸

These quotes, curiously, have gone almost completely ignored by Metternich’s biographers in English, despite the fact that they provide essential windows into the mindset he must have formed. The greatest scientist of the eighteenth century, of whom Metternich must have read, was Isaac Newton. Newton, even as an Englishman, dominated German scientific thinking in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹ It was Newtonian physics which gave birth to Newtonian optimism, a staunchly conservative moral-scientific philosophy which supplanted mathematical rationality upon hypothetical realities, arguing that a logical and reasonable God had created a world which obeyed unbreakable logical rules. As such, the world was one which functioned in obedience of a natural order, with the most optimistic thinkers believing that as the creator God certainly obeyed the same rationality of the world he

¹⁰⁸ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 23.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas P. Saine, *The Problem of Being Modern: or, The German Pursuit of Enlightenment from Leibniz to the French Revolution* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 29.

created, then the world known had to be the best of all possible worlds. A world which was not the best would be illogical to create, after all.¹¹⁰ This is the sort of thinking most often associated with the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz—a philosophical inspiration for Metternich’s friend and mentor, Professor Vogt. Koch, meanwhile, was a Westphalian expert. The Treaty of Westphalia was that which had created the concept of equality and sovereignty among nations, resolving the great European conflict of the seventeenth century which had been, in many ways, caused by both political and religious power imbalances within the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹¹

These are the factors which gave birth to Metternich’s substantive belief in the necessity of a balance of power. Historical evidence suggested that an imbalance would lead to war and ruination. The concept of states as solidified political entities fully in control of their own affairs made the idea of balancing them off each other that much more logical, as they could be understood as concrete units rather than the quasi-sovereign ones interconnected among a strange hierarchy previously active in the Holy Roman Empire. Philosophically and scientifically, as per the reasoning of the day, a natural order seemed to exist within the world which made it the best of all possible worlds: why then could the same

¹¹⁰ John Henry, *A Short History of Scientific Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 188-189.

¹¹¹ Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe’s Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 754; Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 56-58.

principle not be applied to the political world, where a balance of forces would bring about peace, and thus prosperity? Henry Kissinger himself admits to the Enlightenment connection of the balance of power philosophy in European politics, with that legendary Metternich expert von Srbik himself viewing Metternich as a “systematizer of the state and social order” who had an “exceedingly strong impulse to search beyond the phenomena of the mental and physical world for lawlike regularities and then in the factual realm to test them empirically and experimentally and prove them right.”¹¹² Metternich and his career can thus be viewed, perhaps, as the last great hurrah of the proponents of natural social order, whose political goals stemmed from the desire to bring rational harmony to a disorderly world.

Thus, Metternich was given the intellectual backing for his emotional opposition to revolution. The final question that must be asked, then, is what events codified his association between natural order, peace, and monarchy—and in the inverse, between revolution and chaos? The answer can be largely derived from his own mouth. In 1790, Metternich was present in Frankfurt for the coronation of Emperor Leopold II, which he would remember as “one of the most impressive and splendid spectacles in the world. Everything, down to the most trifling details, spoke to the mind

¹¹² Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 21; Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, “Statesmen of Philosophical Principles,” in *The Metternich Controversy*, ed. Enno E. Kraehe (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 34-35.

and heart through the force of tradition...” Comparing this to the reports of violence already pouring out of France, where revolution had broken out the year before, Metternich only saw “with all the force of youthful impressions, the contrast between the country contaminated by Jacobinism, and the country where human grandeur was united with a noble national spirit.” The contrast was set even deeper only two years later, at the coronation of Francis II, which Metternich also attended, when violence in France had escalated even further. By that time, war had been declared on Austria, with the violent excesses of the Reign of Terror just on the horizon.¹¹³ Shortly after, while curiously silent in regards to Louis XVI’s 1793 execution, the execution of Marie Antoinette later that year brought forth Metternich’s first political writing. In an open letter, he furiously condemned the action, angrily declaring to the Empire’s citizens that “the blood of your immortal [Maria] THERESA, the blood of AUSTRIA herself, [has been] spilled upon a scaffold!!!” “Ruin fall upon the heads of those impious murderers, murderers of their kings and of their Fatherland,” he further elaborated, with a measure more of self-control.¹¹⁴ As a loyal servant of the Empire, whose parents and family had made their fortune in the service of the Habsburg emperors, and whose concept of tradition and order was firmly tied to imperial dignity, his anger was certainly justified.

¹¹³ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 7-8, 12; Rowe, *From Reich to State*, 48.

¹¹⁴ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 339.

Furthermore, the Revolution would not stay a distant enemy, for Metternich's Rhineland lay directly within its path. From the outset of France's troubles in 1789, aristocrats fleeing for their lives poured over the border into the empire's principalities, establishing courts in exile in the Rhineland with a center at Coblenz—Metternich's own home city. While tensions ran high between the French and local citizens, Metternich fully immersed himself within their society, proclaiming that he had “learned to estimate the difficulty of erecting a society on new foundations, when the old are destroyed,” from the exiles, likely only fully reinforcing his previously established aristocratically inclined sensibilities.¹¹⁵ By 1792, Coblenz and the surrounding cities and towns¹¹⁶ also became the staging ground for the Prussian counterattack against French aggression.¹¹⁷ From then on, the Revolution, in all its fury, consumed the major locations of Metternich's youth. Strasbourg, where he had studied under the care of Simon and Koch, had already been plundered by revolutionary forces in 1789—an event he had been present to see. Mainz, where he had studied under Professor Vogt and which hosted, in Metternich's words, the most luxurious court in all of Germany, fell in the opening months of 1793 after the Prussian

¹¹⁵ Rowe, *From Reich to State* 44-45; von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 7-8.

¹¹⁶ Including, very fittingly, the village of Metternich, today an incorporated part of the city of Coblenz.

¹¹⁷ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 13-14.

defeat at Valmy.¹¹⁸ Mainz's fall then meant that his education there was at an abrupt end, and so he traveled to Brussels, where his father served as imperial minister. There, he witnessed the 1793 capturing of the French border city of Valenciennes by coalition troops. Though he would ultimately earn a reprieve from the chaos surrounding him with a visit to Great Britain on behest of his father's government, he would not return to the Netherlands, for they too would fall in the revolutionaries' counter-attack while he remained abroad – and with them fell Francis George's political career.¹¹⁹ The worst was yet to come, however, and did in October of 1794 when revolutionary forces seized Coblenz itself, and with it, the Metternich family estate.¹²⁰ And so the entire world which Metternich had known in his twenty-one years thus far was swept away by men who, in his mind, seemed intent on destroying both his society and his way of life. "I cannot bear the idea of seeing my home in the hands of those rogues," he would write in a letter in December of that year. "According to my way of seeing things, everything has gone to the devil; and the time is come when everyone must save from the wreck what we can."¹²¹

With Coblenz and the Austrian Netherlands gone, the Metternich family moved to take up residence in Vienna as exiles – marking the first time he had actually seen the imperial capital.

¹¹⁸ Kraehe, *German Policy*, 12-13; von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 13.

¹¹⁹ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 15-16, 20-21; Kraehe, *German Policy*, 14.

¹²⁰ Kraehe, *German Policy*, 17.

¹²¹ von Metternich, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 350.

And while it would be several years before his first permanent appointment as an official of the Austrian diplomatic service, Metternich's philosophy and mindset was sealed. Here was a man who had grown up the model of a diplomatic and cosmopolitan aristocrat, surrounded by imperial traditions which served to uphold order within the world he knew, forced to bear direct witness to the violent overthrow of that entire system and the physical world that embodied it. Thus, while the intellectual origins of Metternich's philosophy can be clearly traced to the influences of the men who educated him, it was the Revolution itself which defined them and gave them direction. The principle of the balance of power can be seen as the desire to restore natural order to the world, for the Revolution and its wars had thrown Europe out of balance, resulting in lawlessness, destruction, and chaos, which he bore witness to. Only a return to a political balance would allow for a return to order and lawfulness, in Metternich's approximation. The principle of legitimacy was reflected in the same way, for with the overthrow of the French monarchy had come chaos, death, and war, while the staunchly-imperial Holy Roman Empire remained a bastion of tranquility, as symbolized in its coronations. And the principle of conservatism is the insurance that none of this would ever happen again, for as long as the coronations occurred as they should, order would be maintained. Synthesizing all of this information, it becomes more surprising to entertain the thought that Metternich *would not*

become the diplomat that he did under these circumstances than to reflect upon the fact that a minor Rhenish noble such as he rose so high into the halls of history.

While studying in Mainz, Professor Vogt gave Metternich a piece of advice which, by the man's own admission, he would hold dear for the rest of his life. Almost prophetic in the image it conjures, one must wonder if Metternich remembered it apocryphally. Allegedly, Vogt told Metternich that:

Your intellect and your heart on the right road; preserve therein also in practical life, the lessons of History will guide you. Your career, however long it may be, will not enable you to see the end of the conflagration which is destroying the great neighboring kingdom. If you do not wish to expose yourself to reproaches, never leave the straight path. You will see many so-called great men pass by you with swift strides; let them pass, but do not deviate from your path. You will overtake them, if only because you must meet them on their way back!¹²²

This is the image of Metternich that should be constructed as he moved out of his youth and into his professional career: that of a

¹²² Ibid., 11-12.

man boldly walking forward, not deviating from his path even as great men passed him (Napoleon, perhaps), for soon enough he would be overtaking them. Metternich, as has been stated, was not a man who made up the rules as he went along in the political game. He knew who he was and what he believed in, and based his politics on such. His development as a politician is easily traceable by closely examining his early life. It is by recognizing this development and by learning just what this past was that one can come to see him as a very human figure. He was not one sinisterly bent on subjugating Europe, nor an immaculate genius, but rather a man who sought to restore and preserve a world that he firmly believed to be a good and natural one and that was, in his mind, completely opposed by the revolutionary movement.

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