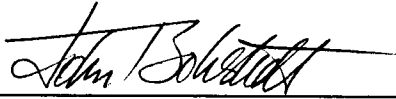


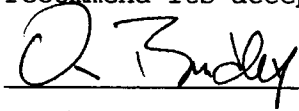
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jack Jeffrey McEwen entitled "A Virtueless Man in an Age of Virtue? A Re-examination of the Political Virtuosity of Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.



John Bohstedt, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

A VIRTUELESS MAN IN AN AGE OF VIRTUE? A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE POLITICAL
VIRTU OF CHARLES-MAURICE DE TALLEYRAND-PERIGORD IN THE FRENCH
MACHIAVELLIAN MOMENT

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jack Jeffrey McEwen

May 1995

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Dr. Jack H. McEwen

and

Ms. June H. McEwen

who have instilled in me an appreciation for

the value of education

and provided the opportunities for advanced study.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Machiavellian virtu of Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord during what has been termed by J.G.A. Pocock a "Machiavellian Moment." This struggle to exercise his political virtu to provide France with a constitutional monarchy required Talleyrand to make many apparent shifts of his allegiance. This in turn has resulted in biographers and historians of Talleyrand to consider him an immoral or amoral diplomat. The ambiguity of his virtu in the French Machiavellian Moment is studied in detail in two significant episodes in his career. The first involves his apparent abandonment of church traditions when he proposed the confiscation of church lands to the National Assembly. The second is his betrayal of Napoleon during the Bourbon Restoration.

Talleyrand consistently strove to provide France with a constitutional monarchy which would prevent foreign invasion or domestic anarchy. The virtu demanded of a prince by Machiavelli was at the heart of his actions. The cases studied exhibit his political virtu in light of this ultimate principle.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporaries, biographers and historians alike have almost unanimously condemned Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand Perigord as a man without virtue. Napoleon described his Foreign Minister as "'Shit in a silk stocking.'" His friend Mirabeau stated that "'he would exchange his soul for a pile of dung, and he would be right to do so.'"¹ Perhaps the title of the biography by Louis Madelin most succinctly exemplifies Talleyrand's reputation among historians: Talleyrand: A Vivid Biography of the Amoral, Unscrupulous and Fascinating French Statesman.² Madelin states that "in such a gross, ignoble, heartless society [France in 1795], what a place could be made for a man who had inherited the subtlety of the old order, but not its troublesome conscience! He kept many of his ideas, but all trace of decent feelings vanished."³ This thesis argues that the uncertainty of the times within which Talleyrand lived, acted, and chose has caused him to appear to be a man without virtue as he apparently shifted his allegiance. I further argue that Talleyrand consistently served one master throughout his public career: the good of France as he saw it.

¹Quoted in Jack F. Bernard, Talleyrand: A Biography (New York: Putnam, 1973), 13.

²Louis Madelin, Talleyrand: A Vivid Biography of the Amoral, Unscrupulous and Fascinating French Statesman (New York: Roy Publishers, 1948).

³Ibid., 45.

The standards which Talleyrand chose to define the good of France parallel in many respects those proclaimed by Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire. Voltaire, an Anglomaniac, was enthralled with the freedoms a literati such as himself could find under Britain's constitutional monarchy. Both Talleyrand and Voltaire believed that France could only find peace under such a system of governance. Neither thought that she could become accustomed to democratic or republican forms. Both feared alike that absolutism could too easily slip into despotism.

Peter Gay's Voltaire's Politics provides the most intensive analysis and summary of Voltaire's political desires. In discussing the conflicts of Louis XV and the parlements in the 1750s and 1760s, Gay notes that Voltaire strongly sided with the King and in favor of absolutism, yet "even the most royalist of lawyers and the most vigorous of kings carefully distinguished between absolutism and despotism."

It did not follow that the king could do as he pleased. . . . This legal tradition was perhaps illogical in that it mixes elements from two positions usually treated as incompatible, constitutionalism and absolutism. but logical or not, it was this 'constitutional absolutism' rather than naked despotism on which eighteenth-century royalists, including Voltaire, rested their case against the parlements.⁴

Voltaire sought to use an enlightened monarchy to achieve a balance for France along the lines of the English model. As Gay further argues, Voltaire

wanted to employ royal power as the engine of reform in France, but . . . he wanted to check and guide that power by the force of public opinion. That opinion was not embodied in formal institutions as it was in England Voltaire's persistent demand for free speech in all matters,

⁴Peter Gay, Voltaire's Politics: The Poet as Realist (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 314-5.

in formal institutions as it was in England
 Voltaire's persistent demand for free speech in all matters,
 including religion and politics, envisaged a rational
 administration, governing through fixed rules and
 cooperating with a free and informed public.⁵

Voltaire sought a monarchy balanced by an enlightened expression of the public interest, an ideal which he never saw embodied. While he remained a devoted enemy of the parlements and of aristocratic privilege, he sought a monarchy balanced by constitutional principles.

Likewise, Talleyrand observed in 1815 that he "was convinced that France could only find quiet and freedom in a constitutional monarchy."⁶ The good of France, for Talleyrand, entailed quiet and freedom. Yet quiet from what noise, and freedom from whom or for what? The moment in time in which Talleyrand acted - the generation of the French Revolution - confronted the leaders and would-be leaders of France with an opaque, ambiguous variety of options from which to devise a new government. The options tried had varying levels of success. Talleyrand consistently sought to give France that form which he thought would best provide quiet from anarchy and freedom from foreign intervention: a hereditary, constitutional monarchy.

The context of turmoil in which Talleyrand sought to serve France was by no means new. J.G.A. Pocock, in his seminal work The Machiavellian Moment, has provided a paradigmatic model which this thesis follows. Talleyrand and other leaders of the revolution confronted what Pocock has termed a "Machiavellian Moment." Pocock's notion of the Machiavellian Moment will be discussed at some length in

⁵Ibid., 330.

⁶Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, Prince de Benevet, Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, trans. Ms. Angus Hall, vol. 3 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 157. Subsequent references to the Memoirs will be noted as: Talleyrand, Memoirs, volume number, page number.

Chapter One. At this point it will suffice to say that the Machiavellian Moment describes, in one sense, the confrontation of the practice of virtu with fortune and corruption. Virtu, for Pocock, is

that by which the good man imposed form on his fortuna. What Machiavelli is doing, . . . [is] asking whether there is any virtu by which the innovator . . . can impose form upon his fortuna and whether there will be any moral quality in such a virtu or in the political consequences which can be imagined as flowing from its exercise. Since the problem only exists as the result of innovation, which is a political act, its exploration must be conducted in terms of further political action.⁷

Of all those who strove to exercise power and impose a form on the course of the revolution in such a moment, Talleyrand proved the most successful, if for no other reason, simply because he was able to survive and return again and again to significant positions of power, influencing France's future course, most often by directing the foreign affairs of the various French governments. From these positions of power Talleyrand applied his political virtu in the face of the corruption of the revolutionary epoch to successfully impose the form he thought would best serve the good of France: a constitutional monarchy which put an end to anarchy at home and provided the requisite strength needed to prevent foreign intervention or invasion.

To analyze Talleyrand's application of his political virtu in such a manner requires a somewhat different approach to the historical problem presented by the revolution itself. While revolutions have for some decades been analyzed as processes undergone by states and societies - collectivities - here it is considered much as one might

⁷J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton: University Press, 1975), 157.

examine a battle in war: as a fortuna presented to an individual far beyond his control and often even his comprehension.

Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord's careers have earned him the distinction of being called, among other less agreeable epithets, a chameleon. His uncanny ability to return to positions of power and prominence under eight different governments led one biographer, Crane Brinton, to entitle his work The Lives of Talleyrand [emphasis added]. Indeed, one life does not seem adequate for the remarkable statesman. A brief biographical sketch will illuminate the apparent contradictions within his life, allow an analysis of his Machiavellian virtu, and show him in his own Machiavellian moment.

Talleyrand was born in Paris on February 13, 1754, to a noble family.⁸ Permanently crippled when he fell from a chest of drawers at the age of four, he was forced by his parents to forfeit his rights of primogeniture because a man with a permanent limp could not serve in the role of his noble ancestors as the *menin* (the nobleman assigned to the person of the dauphin) nor could he enter the army. The priesthood provided the only acceptable alternative for the son of a nobleman. Talleyrand studied at the seminary at Saint-Sulpice where the "most renowned French bishops since Fenelon"⁹ had been prepared for the priesthood. He then received his theology degree from the Sorbonne, and

⁸For biographical data in this and subsequent paragraphs I am indebted to the numerous biographies listed in the bibliography, especially to Crane Brinton, The Lives of Talleyrand (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1936) and Harold Nicolson, The Congress of Vienna (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), 285-6.

⁹Louis S. Greenbaum, Talleyrand, Statesman-Priest: The Agent General of the Clergy and the Church of France at the End of the Old Regime, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 17. Turgot and Lomenie de Brienne also studied at Saint Sulpice.

began to seek financial security "through plump benefices and higher Church office."¹⁰ Benefices and higher offices rapidly came his way, primarily through the influence of his uncle, Alexandre-Angelique de Talleyrand-Perigord, the pre-revolutionary Archbishop of Rheims and later Cardinal-Archbishop of Restoration Paris.

At age 21, Talleyrand took his first major order, that of the subdiaconate, on April 1, 1775.¹¹ His uncle wasted no time in securing the fruitful positions the young Abbe needed to further his career.

Talleyrand received a chapel, canonry, abbey, deputyship, and executive position in the General Assembly of the Clergy within five months after having received his first major order! It was not long after that his uncle procured for him the promised succession as Agent-General in the next Assembly (1780), an office of great power and influence, whose occupants were, virtually without exception, named bishops in appreciation of their services to the clergy.¹²

These offices provided the young priest, who had scarcely reached his majority, an income which rivaled that of his parents.

Talleyrand's election as a delegate to the prestigious Assembly of the Clergy occurred at the age of twenty-three. The Assembly normally met only once every five years. It had its origins in the unrest before the wars of religion two centuries earlier when the First Estate feared royal despoliation of its temporal properties and wealth. The fears were not groundless, for plans to seize church property "under the premise that it belonged to the nation anyway" date back to the same era when the Second and Third Estates of the Estates General of Orleans

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid. I am indebted to Greenbaum's work for the specific details on Talleyrand's clerical career in this and subsequent paragraphs.

¹²Ibid., 19.

proposed such a measure in 1560.¹³ In 1567 the Assembly reached a contractual agreement with the king by which it recognized its financial obligations to the crown. In return, the crown declared Catholicism the official religion of France and the privileges of the clergy were guaranteed, including rights to levy their own taxes among themselves and to enforce payment of tithes.

Talleyrand became Agent-General of the Clergy in 1780, a post he held until 1785. In this position the church empowered the young Talleyrand to protect its temporal and corporate privileges. The two Agents General directed the fiscal matters of the First Estate between the regular meetings of the Assembly. By Talleyrand's tenure, the Agents also acted in effect as the prime minister of the Assembly. Greenbaum has shown that the other Agent General during Talleyrand's tenure failed to exert even a minimal influence on church affairs, leaving Talleyrand acting in effect as the sole Agent General. The Agent General represented the Clergy in the councils of Government - that is, the king and his ministers - especially as they might debate measures touching on the Church's wealth and privileges. Louis S. Greenbaum observes that "between the five-year intervals of the Assemblies the Agents held in their hands the executive, legal, financial, and administrative authority of the First Estate."¹⁴ Talleyrand ably filled this role as one of the most outspoken defenders of the church's temporal wealth and rights.¹⁵ Among many other accomplishments, most significant for the present research was his

¹³Ibid., 24.

¹⁴Ibid., 62.

¹⁵Ibid., 210-211.

initiation from 1780-85 of the "moves to repulse threats of seizure of ecclesiastical property and to maintain fiscal immunities, [and] to retain the Church's right to the tithes and its maintenance of the civil register."¹⁶ This spirited defense of the inviolability of the Church's wealth and property came from the man who was to propose the confiscation of church lands in 1789. This apparent shift in allegiance forms the focus of Chapter Two which examines Talleyrand's earliest attempts to exercise his virtu in the Machiavellian moment of the early days of the revolution. Talleyrand's service as Agent General had the desired outcome: he became Bishop of Autun on March 13, 1789.

Elected a representative of the clergy in the Estates-General in 1789, Talleyrand joined the revolution in the National Assembly, eventually becoming president of that body. The Bishop of Autun then participated in the *fete* commemorating the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille (The Feast of the Federation) on July 14, 1790. In addition to celebrating this Mass, his role in proposing the confiscation of church property on October 10, 1789, and voting in favor of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in July 1790 led to his excommunication by the Pope in March 1791.

Following a diplomatic appointment to London in 1792, Talleyrand fled to America upon the execution of Louis XVI. He remained in America throughout the Reign of Terror, returning to France only in 1795. In 1797 Barras appointed Talleyrand Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Directory. Foreseeing the downfall of the Directors, he resigned that post only to be reappointed within a fortnight of Napoleon's coup d'etat

¹⁶Ibid., 78.

of 18 Brumaire 1799. He served Napoleon the first consul, consul for life, and emperor through 1807. The Emperor rewarded his faithful servant by naming him Grand Chamberlain in 1804 and Prince de Benevet in 1806. Following the Russian disaster in 1813, Talleyrand remained in Paris to receive the allies in 1814. As temporary head of the provisional government, Talleyrand, apparently betraying the emperor as he had the church in 1789-91, convened the Senate and issued the decree which announced the overthrow of Napoleon.

Talleyrand returned to his post as Minister of Foreign Affairs under the restored monarchy of Louis XVIII and played the decisive role in achieving the Concert of Europe at the Congress of Vienna. An attempt to resolve the ambiguity and conflicts between his apparent loyalty to Napoleon and his participation in the emperor's overthrow forms the focus of the final chapter of this thesis. The "good of France" which Talleyrand served is seen in his efforts to secure and preserve for France her freedom from foreign invaders and quiet from anarchy at home in 1814-15. This will prove to be the central driving force behind his actions in serving the interests of France at the Congress.

Following yet another retirement from public service, Talleyrand resurfaced in 1830, urging Louis-Phillipe to assume the throne. Once again he was rewarded with an appointment, this time as ambassador to London. Talleyrand died on May 17, 1838, at the age of eighty-four.

The literature on Talleyrand is voluminous. Dozens of biographies have been written, the most important of which is Georges Lacour-Gayet's five volume Talleyrand, 1754-1838, published in 1934. This work forms

the foundation of most subsequent studies due to its unparalleled use of the most important primary sources, in particular Talleyrand's correspondence and memoirs. Of subsequent works in English, Crane Brinton's The Lives of Talleyrand provides the most sympathetic view; however, Brinton fails to provide an impartial account in his enthusiastic defense of Talleyrand. Brinton argues that Talleyrand's lies, treachery, disloyalty and willing acceptance of bribes were simply unimportant in light of his astounding political achievements.

Other defenders of Talleyrand include Duff Cooper, Jack Bernard and Jean Orieux. Cooper's Talleyrand, published in 1932, is probably the most highly regarded biography of the statesman in English. On the whole Cooper paints a sympathetic picture of Talleyrand which borders on a lengthy defense of his hero. Cooper tends to accept Talleyrand's accounts at face value, even at times giving credit to him which Talleyrand himself does not claim. Even with such prejudices, Cooper's work is a very readable and scholarly biography. Less scholarly and more a descriptive biography, Jack Bernard's Talleyrand: A Biography fails to make a final assessment of its subject. Bernard, however, comes off as an admirer of Talleyrand. Finally, Jean Orieux's openly biased Talleyrand: The Art of Survival seeks to entertain rather than to inform. Orieux's background as a novelist shines through in the work, but the historical context given is too sketchy and the book tends to be merely anecdotal.

Two works, Guglielmo Ferrero's The Reconstruction of Europe: Talleyrand and the Congress of Vienna and Emile Dard's Napoleon and Talleyrand, give more impartial accounts of Talleyrand's career.

Ferrero's work exhibits little concern with passing judgement on its subject. Rather, as an excellent example of the emphases of the "New History" of the 1930s and 1940s, Ferrero attempts to use the events of the Congress of Vienna in an attempt to address the situation faced by Europe in the aftermath of the First World War and the beginnings of the Second. Dard's work makes use of a number of previously unused primary sources, most significantly Talleyrand's correspondence with one of Napoleon's aides-de-camp, Caulaincourt. This scholarly work provides an excellent, unbiased historical description of the intricacies of the relationship between the emperor and his minister.

Finally, Louis Madelin's previously quoted biography of Talleyrand provides an enthusiastic assault on its subject, the amoral and unscrupulous statesman. Madelin betrays himself as a conservative who holds Napoleon in very high esteem, a fact which obviously colors his interpretation of the former minister who proclaimed the emperor's overthrow and ushered in the Bourbon Restoration. Both his defenders and detractors accept that Talleyrand was, at best, amoral, and often simply immoral. His defenders gloss over this immorality by acclaiming his great accomplishments while his detractors use his unrighteousness to indict him and denigrate the same accomplishments.

Little has been written since the early 1970s on this remarkable statesman. Only three articles on Talleyrand were published in the early 1980s, and six dissertations on Talleyrand have been written since 1934. Although the events of Talleyrand's remarkable career have been extremely well documented, no adequate attempt has been made to analyze his choices and actions based on an encounter with a Machiavellian

moment. Many label Talleyrand a Machiavellian, but fail to define in what sense. The label is merely an epithet. Both Brinton and Simon Schama make the statement that Talleyrand found his inspiration in Voltaire rather than Rousseau, as did so many of his contemporaries; however, neither adequately support this claim. They both present it as a fact to be accepted without supporting evidence.¹⁷

Apparent dramatic shifts in Talleyrand's allegiance present the central problem in understanding Talleyrand's virtue. This thesis examines two such shifts in detail. Chapter Two examines why the young priest who ardently defended the temporal wealth and power of the church from 1780-1785 as Agent-General of the Clergy later proposed the confiscation of church lands to the National Assembly. Chapter Three analyzes the occasion when Napoleon's foreign minister and advisor became the man who proclaimed the emperor's overthrow as temporary head of the provisional government, almost single-handedly ushering in the Bourbon Restoration of Louis XVIII. The first case led to Talleyrand's excommunication by the Pope, the second to his appointment as Minister of Foreign affairs at the Congress of Vienna and his greatest accomplishment - the Concert of Europe.

The political theories of Machiavelli and Francois Marie-Arouet de Voltaire will be examined in light of their influence on Talleyrand's thought and action, rather than imposing modern notions of what constitutes 'virtue', in order to understand why Talleyrand not only stayed in France while other nobles fled the country, but took a leading

¹⁷Simon Schama, Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1989), 869. Schama states that "Every time he [Talleyrand] was faced with the ghost of Jean-Jacques, he fought it off with the countershade of Voltaire."

role in shaping the Revolution, the foreign policy of Napoleon, and the reconstruction of Europe at the Congress of Vienna. By gaining an understanding of why Talleyrand, a member of both of the privileged estates (clergy and nobility), was a Revolutionary, this thesis will provide a possible explanation for the participation of other members of the first two estates in the French Revolution.

For sake of clarity, the term 'virtue' will be limited in this thesis to the common connotation of a moral or ethical virtue while 'virtu' will denote the Machiavellian notion of competent political action in the confrontation with corruption and fortune. My thesis is that while Talleyrand had goals similar to other leaders of the constitutional Revolution of 1789, he lacked many of their 'virtues.' Further, Talleyrand's own virtu, drawn in part from Voltaire's principles and Machiavelli's politics, enabled him not only to survive where those of 'virtue' could not, but to thrive and achieve his goals within a Machiavellian Moment: the possession and exercise of real power and prestige in an effort to assure the continued existence, peace, and prosperity of France.

Talleyrand's power was real in a sense unknown by his immediate noble predecessors. Although from an ancient noble family considered cousins of the King, Talleyrand's parents (like many at the Court of Versailles in the eighteenth century) lacked the fundamental bases of prestige and power their descendant was to achieve - wealth and a position which allowed him to exercise control over the politics of his time. To regain these lost privileges of the nobility, and more importantly to keep them, the 'virtue' of Rousseau proved inadequate and

even in direct opposition to his goals. As Talleyrand noted in his

Memoirs:

the impulse [for revolution] once given, the rapid and violent excitement of minds prevented, at every stage of the Revolution, the development of private ambitions. All ideas tending, from the beginning, to establish equality and to weaken all power, lofty ambitions were necessarily discountenanced.¹⁸

Private ambitions, such as his own, did not preclude the service of the good of France for Talleyrand. Rather, such ambitions actually coincided with what became his highest principle for France: the principle of constitutional monarchy.

But why did Talleyrand, and other members of the nobility, see constitutional monarchy as the salvation of France in light of numerous examples of monarchical ineptitude and attempts at despotism. Talleyrand never defended despotism or even absolutism. Rather, in line with a tradition of noble revolts against absolutism noted by Georges Lefebvre in The Coming of the French Revolution, Talleyrand believed a strong nobility was necessary as a check against absolutism. Lefebvre's explication of the struggle between aristocracy and crown is worthy of quoting at length.

Under Louis XIV the conflict seemed to be over, and the nobility saw itself at last even subjected to direct taxation. While consolidating the territories of France the royal power thus prepared the unity of the nation, . . . endeavoring to unite all Frenchmen under the same law. . . . But the successors of Louis XIV did not finish the great work [of unifying the nation and subjecting the aristocracy]. It is customary to characterize the eighteenth century as the age of the rise of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of "philosophy," but the century also witnessed the last offensive of the aristocracy, of which

¹⁸Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 162.

the beginnings of the Revolution were merely the crowning effort.¹⁹

Lefebvre further argues that "the nobility, not content with monopolizing the higher public employments, nourished an ambition to share in the central government."²⁰

Talleyrand sought a constitutional monarchy in light of the conflict described by Lefebvre. First and foremost, a strong nobility prevented the ambitions of the kings to move to absolutism or despotism by providing a check against royal authority. Second, the nobility argued that their rights to share in government and advise the king rested on claims of feudal rights of which the monarchy had attempted to despoil them. Finally, Talleyrand wished to complete the unfinished task of the monarchy to unify the nation. A strong, and thus safe and secure, France needed to be unified in law, language, weights and measures, tolls and tariffs, and administrative districts. Talleyrand lent much of his effort in the National Assembly to the consummation of these goals. The King was to be the first gentleman of the state, but the rights of nobles were thus necessary for the prevention of despotism and the unity of France. Monarchy had the advantage of a continuation of a great and powerful heritage in France, but the actions of the last of the Capetians to usurp authority from the nobility helped bring about the conflict that ignited the revolution. Talleyrand sought to restore, rather than invent, a monarchy balanced by a powerful nobility.

Late in his career, the principle of constitutional monarchy became even more valuable to him than that of legitimacy. The actions

¹⁹Georges Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947, 1975, 1989), 16.

²⁰Ibid., 19.

of the "legitimate" ruler, Charles X, in attempting to drop the semblance of a constitutional government and return to an absolute monarchy in the late 1820's, led Talleyrand to believe that legitimacy had betrayed itself. "It became necessary to look to the safety of France [from the threat of despotism] at all hazards, and at least rescue, if it were possible, the monarchical principle, independent of legitimacy, in the great tempest thus raised."²¹ This monarchical principle necessitated the salvation, for Talleyrand, of the order to which he had been born - the nobility. Yet, the nobility had failed to serve its purpose of exercising influence and power as balances to the threat of despotism. Rather than the loss of their privileges, the key to this degeneration, he argued, was the loss of their wealth.

However painful for the nobility the loss of their titles and privileges may have been, it was incomparably less so than the situation to which they were going to be reduced by the simple forfeiture of their revenues. For nobility, an essential element of a monarchy, is not a simple element, and birth without wealth, or wealth without birth does not constitute, politically speaking, a perfect nobility.²²

Monarchy without a virile nobility was at best absolutism; at its worst, despotism.

For Talleyrand, the ambition of the nobility in obtaining personal wealth was a necessary precondition for a strong and effective monarchy. Such a monarchy provided for the good of France: her unity, peace, prosperity and security from foreign invasion and influence. Talleyrand firmly believed that monarchy alone could ameliorate the sufferings caused by the political conflict of the revolutionary moment. This

²¹Ibid., vol. 3, 226.

²²Ibid., vol. 1, 96.

explains why Talleyrand never attempted to deny nor to apologize for his willingness to use his offices to accept bribes and increase his personal fortune. For him, the increase of personal wealth increased the power of the nobility which, in turn, provided the necessary preconditions for a strong French monarchy.

Talleyrand was a man of virtue, but this thesis will show that that virtue necessitated actions and a philosophy that have subsequently been described as amoral or even immoral. His virtue constituted a virtuosity of belief and behavior rather than a moral or ethical system. Napoleon and Mirabeau were probably right in their assessments, but this silk stocking stayed in power for decades after they were gone. This thesis will attempt to show how and why.

CHAPTER 1 - THE DILEMMA OF DEFINING REVOLUTIONARY VIRTU

In what sense did a Machiavellian Moment confront Talleyrand?

Professor Pocock's significant, pioneering work examines two senses of the Machiavellian Moment: first, the moment in Florentine history which provided the context for Machiavelli's political writings and theories; and second, the

'Machiavellian Moment' denotes the problem itself. It is a name for the moment in conceptualized time in which the [Florentine] republic was seen as confronting its own temporal finitude, as attempting to remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events. . . . This was spoken of as the confrontation of "virtue" [virtu] with "fortune" and "corruption".¹

The Machiavellian Moment thus involves the ability to use virtu to put form on one's circumstances while buffeted by the innovation and corruption of fortune. This problem in conceptualized time, for Machiavelli, involved the continued existence of the Florentine republic. Machiavelli, Pocock argues, wished above all else to ensure the continued existence of the republic. Only within the context of the republic could Machiavelli's ideal of civic humanism flourish. He confronted, as would Talleyrand, a threat to that form of government which he held dear. The threat in Florence involved either invasion by foreign powers, such as France or Venice, or a change from within in the mode of governance to dictatorship or despotism. Either of these threats to the republic would result in the destruction of the ability

¹J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton: University Press, 1975), viii.

of the elite of Florence, including Machiavelli, to exercise their influence on the affairs of the state.

Machiavelli depicted this "moment" in terms of the confrontation of *virtu* with corruption and fortune. The nature of Talleyrand's *virtu* will be gleaned from within this conceptualization. Pocock argues that *fortuna*, for Machiavelli, "is . . . the circumstantial insecurity of political life." [emphasis mine].² Thus, the problem of fortune and corruption only affects those who seek to be actively involved in political life. As Pocock observes, fortune and corruption often occur during times of upheaval and innovation. Pocock further argues that "to these continuing problems Machiavelli . . . left an important paradigmatic legacy: concepts of balanced government, dynamic *virtu*, and the role of arms and property in shaping the civic personality."³ Corruption, then, consists of the degeneration of such concepts as balance, *virtu*, and the role of arms and property by *fortuna*. Politics, of which Talleyrand proved to be an unparalleled master in his day, "is the art of dealing with the contingent event."⁴ Therefore, "it is the art of dealing with *fortuna* as the force which directs such events and thus symbolizes pure, uncontrolled, and unlegitimated contingency."⁵ Machiavelli inseparably links his notion of *virtu* with the art of politics. For both Machiavelli as actor and theorist, and Talleyrand as actor, *virtu* and politics consist of the ability to deal with such contingent events as innovation and corruption threaten to bring to

²Ibid., 38.

³Ibid., viii.

⁴Ibid., 156.

⁵Ibid.

their homelands. Machiavelli further distinguishes between the innovation and corruption brought about by fortune and the innovation which the man of virtu can impose on his circumstances.

The Machiavellian concept of the virtu of the Prince merits further examination. Machiavelli's virtu was a practical exercise of power in the public service of one's state which focused on positive results irrespective of moral or ethical questions. In the face of the corruption and fortune of the revolutionary era in France, the definition of "one's state" was almost constantly in flux, as the varieties of constitutions and governmental forms in France from 1789-1799 attest. For the statesman such as Talleyrand, the definition one chose determined what the service of that state was. The good of France and the service of the state inhere within the definition the individual chose. Robespierre's devotion and service of Republican France mirror Talleyrand's devotion to a constitutional monarchy as each faced the Machiavellian moment in their own way. The role of innovation of the man of virtu includes his ability and willingness to provide definition to the politics of his day.⁶

⁶What is a state as opposed to a nation? This question is somewhat anachronistic in that the rise of nationalism (the effort of a nation - those bound by a common language, history, culture, sense of belonging, and clearly defined territory - to assert its independence vis-a-vis other nations or groups) is more of a nineteenth and twentieth century phenomenon. I concur with portions of Samuel Huntington's attempt at a new paradigm in "The Clash of Civilizations" in this regard. Huntington argues that prior to the French and American revolutions, conflict tended to be seen as between princes but began to be seen as conflict between nations during the Napoleonic period. Love of France, or the service of France, or the "good" of France, did not involve a modern concept of nationalism for either Talleyrand or any other leaders of the revolutions. Their efforts to determine what the nation was - and thus what the good or service of that nation were - evolved during the period under consideration. The "nation" was not a clear-cut, well-defined territory or group of people. These issues were opaque, and many views, oftentimes conflicting views, of the good of the nation and of the nation itself, competed within the revolutionary rhetoric and action to shape

Pocock further argues that the "Machiavellian Moment" has a continuing history to which Machiavelli and his contemporaries left a paradigmatic legacy. Pocock pursues this legacy into seventeenth and eighteenth century British and American thought, but he does not follow it in any detail in the non-Anglophone traditions in Europe. The confrontation of "virtu" with "fortune" and "corruption" was more violent in France in 1789 than in seventeenth century England or eighteenth century America. This thesis will engage Pocock's concept of a Machiavellian paradigm with the political career of Talleyrand in an effort to uncover a consistent system of Machiavellian virtu for the notoriously amoral and unscrupulous statesman.

What then is this Machiavellian virtu? A difficulty arises in that commonly held connotations of virtue can often conflict with the views held by Machiavelli. Virtue carries numerous connotations, the most common one inextricably linking virtue with consistent, ethical conduct by an individual based on some coherent, moral system. The virtuous life is the moral life. Often, and this provided one option in the eighteenth century, such a system of morals was founded on faith in the revealed truth in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The content of that revealed truth was hotly debated in the eighteenth century, with Jesuit, Jansenist, Protestant, and Scholastic varieties among others. This sense of virtue tended toward a private morality and concern for the immortality of the soul - a concern not unfelt by Talleyrand as his

the foundations of modern nationalism. Thus resulted the dilemma faced by Talleyrand and others who would lead. The problem of definition is not new to this thesis: it was inherent within the revolutionary moment. See Samuel F. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993.

deathbed letters seeking forgiveness by the Pope will demonstrate. However, moral virtue, in a traditional Christian sense of right relationship with one's maker influencing one's actions, had a negligible impact on the political and public career, choices, and actions of Talleyrand. Rather, a Machiavellian virtu - a practical concern with the obtainment, exercise, and retention of power with a skill or virtuosity - was central to Talleyrand's actions. Thus, vice, the opposite of Christian virtue, did not play that role for Talleyrand's Machiavellian virtu. The loss of power and prestige, even more than the noble concern for the loss of privilege, was the foil of Talleyrand's virtu.

Vice and corruption provided the enemy of other, albeit newer, traditions of virtue in eighteenth century France - those of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment provided several challenges to revealed truth and with it revealed systems of morals. Revelation was mere superstition for the philosophes. Various enlightened notions of virtue emerged in the decades preceding 1789, not without considerable impact. Yet the 'moment' of the revolution thrust these newer systems to the fore as options upon which to base the new governments of France. Most prominent among these was that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau which provided the foundation of the Republic of Virtue.

Patrice Higonnet states the problem of the philosophes succinctly: "the ostensible thrust of the Enlightenment was of Enlightened man against political tyranny and superstition, but the deeper problem was that of man against himself and society. Where did the rights of man

stop and those of society begin?"⁷ This problem of "man against himself and society" confronts the deeper ideological problem of defining the virtuous man and citizen. Higonnet recognizes that, due to both long-standing traditions (such as those of the Catholic Church) and the newer thought of the philosophes, there resulted "the variety of political possibilities which existed in 1789. That some were realized does not by any means imply that other solutions did not exist."⁸ Higonnet's focus on bourgeois attempts to provide a solution, however, has put blinders on the argument of Class, Ideology and the Rights of Nobles during the French Revolution. The bourgeoisie appear as the only ones capable of shaping their fate or the destiny of France. "A more detailed examination of the activities of individual nobles [would not] seem likely to invalidate my argument, which is that the behaviour of nobles was in a sense irrelevant to their fate. What is chiefly relevant . . . is the . . . evolution of bourgeois politics."⁹ While Higonnet is considering only the modernization of domestic political forms, to preserve France in a larger sense, external to that evolution, required a more supple virtue and political art. My thesis proves that the exercise of that virtue by one noble, Talleyrand, was far from irrelevant to either his personal fate or the destiny of France.

Higonnet's focus on bourgeois universalism, an attempt of the bourgeoisie to combine the ideals of individualism and community, does shed valuable light on some of the ideological options which were

⁷Patrice Higonnet, Class Ideology and the Rights of Nobles during the French Revolution (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981), 9.

⁸Ibid., 6.

⁹Ibid., 7.

"realized," if only temporarily and with limited success. Foremost among these is that of the Republic of Virtue, based on the notion of virtue gleaned from Rousseau. A recapitulation of the moral imperative inherent in Rousseau's thought illustrates why his notion of virtue was anathema to Talleyrand. "Man, for Rousseau, was enmeshed in the life of the community," as Higonnet observes. "He might ignore politics but he could not ignore his fellow man."¹⁰ In the state of decay and corruption of eighteenth century France, Rousseau proposed a double faceted solution:

first, society had to be made moral, or rather, made moral again. . . . Second, man should become more independent, less demanding, and, in a word, more virtuous, where, as Judith Sklar explains, 'virtue was self-love utterly transformed.' Only then would each man be able to bring about within himself that 'reconciliation of duty and inclination' which was the central moral strategy in Rousseau's thought.¹¹

Virtue, then, for Rousseau and his disciples, involved morality and the utter transformation of self-love which allowed the reconciliation of one's inclinations with one's duty toward society. Such a virtue conflicts completely with the virtu of a Machiavelli, who argued that "if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need."¹² Rather than a reconciliation of inclination and duty through the transformation of self-love, Machiavelli argues that the prince must be willing to use whatever he finds to be necessary for the maintenance of his rule. Moral virtue can be a hindrance to successful politics. Rousseau's

¹⁰Ibid., 12.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 91.

moral virtue could not appeal to Talleyrand anymore than it could fit with Machiavelli's virtue. The success of Talleyrand during his lifetime implies that his choice of political virtue provided a more effective, efficient, and realistic option at the time than the short-lived Republic of Virtue.

Talleyrand confronted the questions of virtue and the good in a truly Machiavellian Moment when existing systems of governance, power, privilege, authority, and, in a word, virtue, faced innovation, corruption and fortune. The context of Talleyrand's public career included perhaps the most remarkably ambiguous, fluctuating series of events, governmental systems and experiments, and philosophies of state and of history ever afforded to the span of one diplomat's career. From the 1780s through 1830 he served in a variety of roles in the church and the various governments of France. The events of those years threw all previously held and practiced ideologies and philosophies of the state into flux. Talleyrand chose and acted within the context of that state of flux. His definitions of France, and the good of France, were moulded piecemeal over the course of his public career.

Why then Machiavelli's virtue? I will examine Talleyrand's struggle to assert his virtue in light of the Machiavellian moment in France in 1789-1815. For Talleyrand, the Machiavellian Moment in France consisted of the threat to monarchical rule by both internal anarchy and external threat of invasion. His desire to establish a constitutional monarchy free from either threat led to his attempts to salvage the monarchy in 1789-91 from fiscal ruin by proposing the confiscation of Church lands. His role in the Bourbon Restoration and Congress of

Vienna did save France from the very real threat of rule by hostile foreign powers. Pocock does not address the French situation more than in passing, focusing instead on Britain and America - more successful, republican transformations in the face of the innovation/corruption of fortune. Virtue proved insufficient in revolutionary France, although Rousseauist notions of virtue did have limited, temporary ascendancy. Talleyrand survived and thrived because he did not place primary emphasis on ethical or moral notions of personal or public virtue. Rather, he succeeded because of a Machiavellian virtue, in part seen in his political and diplomatic virtuosity (an ability to play different games under different rules - rules of his own choosing or creation). His virtue allowed him to successfully act in the moment, eventually establishing in France a constitutional monarchy admitted to the circle of Great Powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15.

Voltaire said that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him. Indeed, to paraphrase, had Machiavelli not existed, it would have been necessary for Talleyrand to invent him. Talleyrand's Memoirs, written in part during the Bourbon Restoration, are a Machiavellian defense of Talleyrand's actions before and during the various phases of the revolution. This is not to say that Talleyrand was merely or thoroughly a Machiavellian, although evidence in his memoirs, to be discussed in more detail later, exists of his reading and application of The Prince. Neither was Talleyrand simply a child of Voltaire or of the Catholic Church. Rather, Talleyrand drew on all of these resources as he sought to piece together his own political virtue.

So what if Talleyrand had some underlying sense of virtue? This type of history is not in vogue, and trends in French history have definitely been away from mere histories of ideas or of individuals - from *l'histoire evenementielle* toward studies of the *longue duree*. While these new methodologies have added to our understanding of history by providing new approaches to both old and new subjects, the history of the impact of ideas on individuals and their actions still can bear fruit. J.H.M. Salmon puts forth an argument for the validity of intellectual and social *l'histoire evenementielle* in Renaissance and Revolt. I concur with Salmon that "intellectual and social history should complement each other, if not actually be conjoined in an endeavour to reach a more general understanding." Especially appropriate for this thesis is his further argument that "ideas can be a stimulus to action as well as a means of legitimating the outcome of events."¹³

Salmon's concise outline of twentieth century trends in social history, and his argument for his approach to intellectual and social history, are well suited to my own approach.¹⁴ Salmon argues that Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch reacted against a preoccupation with discrete events by diplomatic and political historians in founding the *Annales* movement. While these founders turned to social history and the study of mental habits, the next generation of *annalistes* "expressed an outright hostility to history as event."¹⁵ For these reasons, among

¹³J.H.M. Salmon, Renaissance and Revolt (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), 1.

¹⁴I am indebted to J.H.M. Salmon, Renaissance and Revolt, for the information in this and subsequent paragraphs on the historiography of intellectual and social history in France.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 3.

others, the *Annales* movement sought a time frame "that transcended the actions of individuals and subordinated personality to collective mentality." Salmon contends that "in the vast perspective of the *longue duree* problems of objectivity disappeared."¹⁶ Further, the *annalistes* argued that only the historian could perceive ultimate reality, and that, as a consequence, the individual actor was "always the dupe of his time."¹⁷ While

to the neo-Marxist, the structuralist, and the Braudelien, the historically situated individual has a spurious view of reality, and to think otherwise is to share the misconceptions of liberal empiricists who reject grand theory and take refuge in the evanescent procession of events and conscious ideas . . . , I have resisted the reduction of history to immobility and facelessness, and have felt no enthusiasm for the view . . . that the course of human affairs is arbitrary and ultimately inexplicable.¹⁸

Salmon somewhat overstates his case in reaction to recent trends in French historiography. Since all history is selective, one can always call historians with different principles of selection "reductionists." The Marxists and Braudelians do, of course, offer explanatory models for the course of human affairs. However, I concur with Salmon that there are other ways to handle the influence of *ideas* within their social context than by reducing the individual to a dupe of his own circumstances.

My purpose in this thesis is the investigation and analysis of the influence of ideas upon the thought and action of Talleyrand. Whether a "dupe of his time" or not, ideas regarding the course which France should follow under a constitutional monarchy did influence his choices,

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 7.

and his choices had dramatic and long-lasting consequences for both France and Europe - as the century of general peace in Europe accomplished by the Congress of Vienna illustrates. "The task of the historian of ideas," according to Ira Wade, "is to make some coherent sense of the activity of people thinking, saying, doing, becoming." To do this, the historian must know "intimately people (or those who stand out), their activity, the directing thoughts, those who gave them direction as well as what grew out of them, and finally the causal relationships which occurred between thought and action."¹⁹ My concern here is to attempt to link the history of ideas with diplomatic and political history, rather than with social history as Salmon has done.

What then can be done to provide a continuity to the practices of such an apparently discontinuous life and career? Talleyrand claims in his own Memoirs that

The private memoirs and lives of celebrated men are the source of true history; as compared with tradition, which is always credulous and even superstitious, they serve to criticize its accounts or to support them, and help with it to give history the character of authenticity to which it lays claim.²⁰

While his understanding of the purpose and usefulness of memoirs can be debated, the fact remains that he composed his memoirs, according to his own explanation, to serve posterity as "true history." This becomes curious as the Memoirs are examined in detail, for "true history" they surely are not. However, neither do they exhibit the traits one expects

¹⁹Ira Owen Wade, The Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment (Princeton: University Press, 1971) xvii.

²⁰Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, Prince de Benevet, Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, trans. Ms. Angus Hall, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 110. Subsequent references to the Memoirs will be noted as: Talleyrand, Memoirs, volume number, page number.

from a man with the reputation of Talleyrand, and the trait of most memoirs which tends to make them suspect as a valid historical source: a self-defense. John Whitelaw Reid notes in the Introduction to the Memoirs that the one "aim of Prince Talleyrand was to elucidate and vindicate his own large part in the events of his time. . . . [However,] he apologizes for nothing."²¹ Vindication of his part without apology for immoral, or unvirtuous, actions makes little sense without accepting that Talleyrand cared more for the virtue of his actions than their moral or ethical virtue.

Talleyrand's system of virtue emerges in both what is said and, perhaps more importantly, what he fails to say or mentions only in passing in the Memoirs. These areas on the fringes of his memoirs provide the key to an understanding of the driving principles behind his life and actions: his belief in the necessity of providing, or restoring, a constitutional monarchy to France with a powerful nobility to prevent the state from falling into despotism; and the completion of the task of unifying France. Rather than a man of many lives, Talleyrand found himself torn between the traditions of the past from which he could never completely divorce himself, including those of the church, Machiavelli and Voltaire, and the opportunities for providing France with a constitutional monarchy presented him by the fortune and corruption of the revolutionary era. His actions take on the character of Machiavelli's Prince with an enlightened philosophy of state provided in part by Voltaire. The reason he could not serve the Republic of

²¹John Whitelaw Reid, "Introduction" to Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, xvi.

Virtue is that no aristocratic disciple of Machiavelli and Voltaire could have - Rousseau's ideas were anathema to Talleyrand.

Talleyrand explains why the nobility had lost its proper place of power and prestige - checks to absolutism - in a passage worth quoting at length. The resumption of their proper role was as essential to the good of France as the preservation of the Florentine republic was for Machiavelli's Florence.

All pre-eminence in social order is founded on one of these four things - power, birth, riches, and personal merit.

. . . under Louis XIV, all the political power became concentrated in the hands of the monarch, and the orders of the State no longer possessed any.

Industry and commerce gave riches to the plebeian class, which developed all sorts of merit.

Only one title of pre-eminence thus remained - birth.

But, as nobility had been conferred for a long time on the purchasers of venal offices, birth itself could be obtained for money, thus lowering it to the level of riches.

. . . Nobility could not fall below riches, without poverty degrading it [sic]; and the greater number of noble families were relatively or absolutely poor.²²

Talleyrand concludes that all the events of the eighteenth century thus described tended to injure the noble class: "that which had been taken from it, and that which had been left to it, the poverty of some of its members, the wealth of the others, their vices and even *their virtues* [emphasis mine]."²³ By implication, then, to regain the proper role afforded the nobility prior to the victories of absolutism under the Capetian monarchs, the importance of the power, birth, riches, and personal merit of the nobility had to be returned to its proper pre-eminence. Yet in a France torn by a series of revolutionary events which led some of the nobility to flee the country while the privileges

²²Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 89.

²³Ibid., 92.

of those remaining in France were being taken away, how were these factors to be reinstated to their proper place?

Talleyrand's familiarity with Machiavelli's The Prince and the philosophical works of Voltaire provide a key to understanding his methods and his political virtu. The library which he purchased immediately upon leaving the Seminary at Saint-Sulpice evidently included the works of a number of seventeenth and eighteenth century writers, as his lengthy discussion of them proves.²⁴ He attributes the spirit of modern philosophy to political motivations, arguing that "it is, beyond a doubt, the spirit of opposition to the established government which is the prime mover in all these new doctrines, which are spread afterwards with various modifications. All other causes, physical and moral, are only secondary and accessory."²⁵ Those philosophers and writers discussed include Bacon, Locke, Newton, the Marquis de Laplace, Montaigne, Rabelais, Descartes, Fontenelle, Maupertuis, Clairault and Voltaire - evidence of a wide range of reading and interest. Of all of these, he concludes that "Voltaire . . . , has perfectly traced the character and mission of true philosophy."²⁶ That true mission is to "'Worship God, serve kings, [and] love mankind."²⁷ Talleyrand took that message to heart, but probably not in that order.

²⁴Ibid., 61-66.

²⁵Ibid., 61.

²⁶Ibid., 62.

²⁷Ibid.

Talleyrand showed his disdain for the later generation of philosophes, and their leanings toward atheism and a new order of moral virtue, in a subsequent passage.

Under the pretext of uprooting superstition, . . . and of extinguishing fanaticism, . . . Helvetius, Condorcet, Raynal, Baron von Holbach, sometimes with 'the state of nature,' sometimes with 'perfectibility,' ruthlessly broke all the ties of moral and political order. What madness to pretend to govern the world with abstract ideas, with analyses, with incomplete notions of order and equality, and with a purely metaphysical morality! We have seen the result of these idle fantasies.²⁸

While this might be a vestige of his loyalty to Catholicism, it more probably reflects Talleyrand's confrontation with the corruption of the political order. The linkage of the moral with the political order becomes explicit in this denunciation, as does the practical concern for the exercise of power in governance, rather than incomplete, metaphysical notions of virtue.

While a reading of Machiavelli by Talleyrand would not be necessary to analyze Talleyrand's confrontation with the Machiavellian Moment, evidence of such a reading also appears in the Memoirs. When coupled with Voltaire's view of the state, a workable public virtue emerges in the actions of Talleyrand. The one reference to The Prince in the Memoirs occurs, significantly, in Talleyrand's exposition on one of his highest principles, that of legitimacy. In a rather extensive gloss of Machiavelli, Talleyrand argues for a distinction between the results of usurpation for various types of governments. In reference to Machiavelli's advice for a usurper of an hereditary monarchy, Talleyrand observes that such a dynasty

²⁸Ibid., 65.

can only die out by the death of all its members. . . . That is why Machiaveli [sic] says in his book of *The Prince*, that the usurper could not firmly establish his power, if he did not take the life of all the members of the family which reigned legitimately. Therefore, this is why the Revolution would have the blood of all the Bourbons.²⁹

Such requirements for extermination, obviously, do not apply to a republic. Therefore, Talleyrand concludes that

though the principle of legitimacy be not less violated by the overthrow of a republican government than by the usurpation of a crown, it does not require that the former be restored, whereas it does require that the crown be returned to him to whom it belongs. Thus is manifested the excellency of the monarchical government, which, more than any other, guarantees the preservation and the perpetuity of states.³⁰

Although Talleyrand's exposition is not very convincing, it does show his effort to reconcile his principle of legitimacy with his desire for a constitutional monarchy. He also reformulated Machiavelli's thought for his own purposes: rather than a belief in the supremacy of the republican form of government seen in Machiavelli's works, Talleyrand deftly shifted the argument to support the monarchical form as most desirable for the preservation and perpetuity of the state. In a confrontation with the Machiavellian moment of the demise of the Empire, Talleyrand significantly chose to justify his actions and his creation of the sacred principle of legitimacy in Machiavellian terms.

Machiavelli's advice for a prince also applied to a man in Talleyrand's position during the revolution and restoration - practical advice on how to establish and maintain personal power and wealth. Scholars dispute the intention of Machiavelli's little work - was it a

²⁹Ibid., vol 2, 120. This portion of the Memoirs was composed during the Restoration.

³⁰Ibid.

serious guidebook for political behavior or ironic in its intent? While these and other questions merit attention, such debates were unlikely to influence Talleyrand's reading of the work in the eighteenth century. Machiavellian notions on governance had had their influence on the emergence of Realpolitik in France, certainly in the decision of the *politiques* to seek political stability over religious intolerance in the sixteenth century. Whether he followed Machiavelli's advice consciously or not, the evidence will show that he did, in fact, apply a Machiavellian virtue in the face of a Machiavellian moment.

Much of The Prince appears to have been written with a political leader like Talleyrand in mind. Several passages will suffice as examples:

The gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation. The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. Therefore if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need.³¹

Herein Talleyrand's actions based on a Machiavellian virtue, rather than a moral or ethical virtue, in the face of a moment which seemed to require the latter, make sense of his decisions which otherwise appear to be amoral or unethical. The commonly held notion of virtue, Machiavelli argues, leads to failure in the face of a virtue which allows a prince to maintain his rule.

In another passage entitled "How princes should honour their word," Machiavelli seems once again to be speaking to Talleyrand:

³¹Machiavelli, 91.

Contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles. . . .

A prudent ruler cannot, and must not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist. . . . One must know how to colour one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived. . . .

A prince . . . cannot observe all those things which give men a reputation for virtue, because in order to maintain his state he is often forced to act in defiance of good faith, . . . [and] religion [emphasis added]. And so he should have a flexible disposition, varying as fortune and circumstances dictate.³²

The "lives" of Talleyrand can be seen as having a continuity under the advice thus given by Machiavelli, in that Talleyrand proved to be flexible in regards to moral virtue and yet consistent in the exercise of virtue as a public figure serving the interests of France by helping to provide a constitutional monarchy within which a powerful class of notables could influence the affairs of state.

Yet The Prince, as noted, cannot be considered a treatise on ethics. If Talleyrand found his sole inspiration in this work, the judgment of both his contemporaries and biographers alike would be correct - Talleyrand would indeed be a man without virtue, principle or moral force. As fellow revolutionary Lazare Carnot accused Talleyrand:

He brings with him all the vices of the old regime, without having been able to acquire any of the virtues of the new one. He has no fixed principles; he changes them as he does his linen, . . . a philosopher, when philosophy is the mode; a republican now, because that is necessary in order to become anything. Tomorrow he will declare for an absolute monarchy, if he can make anything out of it."³³

³²Ibid., 99-101.

³³Quoted in Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, editor's Introduction, viii-ix.

Talleyrand, however, exemplified the virtuosity of a successful ruler so ably, if baldly, espoused by Machiavelli. The evidence of such adept expressions of Machiavellian virtu will be examined in two episodes in the final two chapters of this thesis. It will be shown that in the combination of the principles of the moral force of legitimacy and of a constitutional monarchy that Talleyrand consistently found a means to serve both France and Europe. This service of the good of France and Europe formed his the foundation of his exercise of political virtu.

The descriptions of Machiavelli and Talleyrand, coincidentally, bear a striking resemblance. For example, George Bull writes that:

He [Machiavelli] was certainly a man of strong emotions, far removed from the cold calculating deceiver of the legend. . . . The general impression left by his life and works is of a man withdrawn from the crowd, standing aside with a slight, contemptuous smile on his face. It is surely possible to reconcile an intellectual aloofness and arrogance with a restless urge for active participation in political life. . . .

Machiavelli's loyalty was to the state rather than to the Republic. . . .

. . . the nation was Florence. The city state was the object of his patriotism, and it was Florence which he served or tried to serve with devotion and single-mindedness no matter what the form of her government.³⁴

Biographers, historians and contemporaries alike portray Talleyrand in remarkably similar terms.

In the preface to his Memoirs, written in 1836, Talleyrand echoed Bull's description of Machiavelli:

I considered myself free . . . and did not wish my future to be linked to any political party, for none of them tallied with my views. I . . . decided on serving France for her sake alone. . . . Therefore I do not blame myself for having served all the political parties which ruled France. . . .

³⁴George Bull, "Introduction" to The Prince, by Niccolo Machiavelli (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 17, 15, 12.

I have never considered the interests of any party . . . before the TRUE interests of France, which besides are never, in my opinion, contrary to the TRUE interests of Europe.³⁵

Thus Talleyrand applied the advice of Machiavelli "that the one who adapts his policy to the times prospers."³⁶ Machiavelli further argued that the statesman

must not flinch from being blamed for vices which are necessary for safeguarding the state. This is because . . . he will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practices them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be vices will bring him security and prosperity.³⁷

As noted, Talleyrand used his Memoirs to defend his record of service to the good of France but did not apologize for the vices by which posterity has decided to condemn him. Those are the very vices which Machiavelli argued would bring the security and prosperity sought after by the displaced noble, Talleyrand.

³⁵Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, xxvi, xxviii.

³⁶Machiavelli, 131.

³⁷Ibid., 92.

CHAPTER 2 - APOSTATE PRIEST

The life of a man who served as many governments as Talleyrand and who has been accused of shifting his allegiance whenever such a shift would provide opportunities for personal advancement affords a multitude of particular instances which could serve as case studies for his exercise of virtu in France's Machiavellian moment. The two most striking instances of apparent about-faces performed by Talleyrand will suffice for an examination of his virtu. This chapter explores his explanations for his role in the National Assembly, especially in regards to the acts of that governing body regarding the position of the Catholic Church. As previously noted, Talleyrand ably had served the Church less than a decade earlier as its Agent-General in charge of defending and protecting her temporal rights and powers.

Talleyrand opens his Memoirs by acknowledging his debt to the traditional society of his ancestors for his start in public life. "I was born in 1754; my parents had a very small fortune but held at court a position which . . . could secure for themselves and their children the highest offices."¹ This first sentence of the Memoirs also illustrates one problem which Talleyrand had to overcome, that of the loss of prestige and real power encountered by the nobility. While his

¹Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, Prince de Benevet, Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, trans. Ms. Angus Hall, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 1. Subsequent references to the Memoirs will be noted as: Talleyrand, Memoirs, volume number, page number.

father, Charles-Daniel de Talleyrand-Perigord (1734-88) was a lieutenant-general and *menin* to the dauphin, the once great wealth and power of the noble family from Perigord had diminished to a *very small* fortune. Only the position remained.

Talleyrand spent much of his youth in the family manor in Perigord, the estate of his ancestral provincial lords. There the former power held and exercised by his predecessors had a profound and lifelong impact on the young man. He noted early in his Memoirs that "the Revolution itself failed to tarnish the lustre of, or break the spell possessed by, these ancient seats of power. . . . [They] are like those old deserted shrines from which the faithful have fled, but whose traditions still enforce respect."² The power associated with the noble name also proved a formative influence.

'Your name,' I was daily told [as a child], 'was always held in veneration in our province. . . . He who comes from good stock cannot degenerate.' . . . I am very likely indebted to these early years for the general spirit of my conduct in life.³

Thus, even in his later life as he reflected on his youth, the lost prestige and power once associated with his noble name swelled to the surface of his memory as a powerful force which even the revolution could not tarnish. The traditions of the nobility still commanded respect in his old age. He claimed that they were so important that these traditions explain the general spirit of his conduct throughout his life.

²Ibid., 7.

³Ibid., 8-9.

Talleyrand was also imbued with the influence of another ancient tradition which carried through to his deathbed - that of the Catholic Church. Trained at the seminary at Saint-Sulpice, he received his theology degree from the Sorbonne and entered the priesthood as a young man somewhat divorced from his noble heritage. Yet Talleyrand used the priesthood only as a means to his ends - a position of wealth, power and influence. Following his study at the Sorbonne, rather than filling his days with the pastoral cares and duties of a young priest, he increased his knowledge of the worldly, enlightened side of the eighteenth century.

My first care was to form a library. . . . I sought to make the acquaintance of the men most renowned for their past life, their works, their ambition. . . . I enjoyed the proud pleasure of being indebted to myself alone for my position in life.⁴

A dramatic shift in his indebtedness for his position occurs within the first chapter of his Memoirs! Rather than his father's placement at court affording the privilege of obtaining a position of power for his heir, Talleyrand, through his study of history, now claims an indebtedness only to himself in his emulation of the lives, works and *ambition* of the renowned men he studied. In this Talleyrand follows the advice of Machiavelli that "a prudent man must always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. . . . The less a man has relied on fortune the stronger he has made his position."⁵ Fortune, as used here by Machiavelli, interestingly enough, is the antithesis of *virtu*. As Bull notes, Machiavelli's *virtu* connotes

⁴Ibid., 25.

⁵Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 49-50.

a sense of willpower, "sometimes efficiency, sometimes even with the sense of virtue."⁶ Talleyrand's virtu exhibited Machiavelli's notion, for the former had the uncanny ability to be efficient in asserting his will to power, occasionally even with the sense of virtue.

The problem for Talleyrand lay in how to attain positions of power and prestige along with the wealth which they would bring. For a young priest of noble blood, the obvious goal was a bishopric. Yet Talleyrand had much less concern for spiritual matters than those of a more temporal nature. The stepping stone to both a bishopric and to control over worldly matters presented itself in his appointment as Agent General of the Clergy in 1780. As Talleyrand candidly remarked, "a public career being open to me, I, rather cleverly, took advantage of the position of agent general of the clergy, . . . to extend my relations."⁷ Rather cleverly indeed, for the Agent General, in addition to being the executive administrative officer of the First Estate in the *ancien regime*, was a post from which many had advanced to the bishopric.

Talleyrand took on the Role of Agent-General with a distaste for the manner in which the Church had managed its affairs vis-a-vis the state in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The influence on the young Talleyrand of the Enlightened writers he had studied held sway even in such a powerful clerical position. Discussing the meeting of the assembly of the clergy in 1775, he criticized the church because "in the management of their temporal affairs, the clergy of the eighteenth century made no concessions to the spirit of the times."⁸ The worldly

⁶George Bull, Introduction to Machiavelli, The Prince, 25.

⁷Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 32.

⁸Ibid., 18.

priest realized that the church was the most powerful and wealthy privileged corporation in France, and that France and her church were imperiled more by temporal, fiscal matters than any spiritual ones. Voltaire's cry of the Enlightenment, *écrasez l'infame*, had been directed against the unnatural appeal of the church to superstition and revelation, drawing men away from true progress through the use of their reason. Yet more pragmatic matters truly imperiled the church and the state: the financial disasters of the late eighteenth century. The downfall of the privileges of the church and the revolutions that were to overtake the *ancien regime* had their roots in the fiscal conditions on the eve of the revolution.

Talleyrand took very seriously his role as the protector of the temporal affairs of the church in France. Louis Greenbaum, in his Talleyrand: Statesman Priest, argues that

the history of the Church of France which Talleyrand served after the third quarter of the eighteenth century reveals a dramatic change in emphasis from matters of faith and doctrine to an almost exclusive preoccupation with temporal affairs. At stake was the inviolability of the clergy's landed wealth and corporate privileges, symbols which brought into question the whole matter of its existence as an autonomous Estate.⁹

The government of Louis XVI had begun to consider an attack upon the privileges and wealth of the Church to address the bankruptcy facing the state. Greenbaum argues that in Talleyrand's five year tenure, he provided a more energetic defense of the clergy's exemptions, wealth, and existence against the claims of the state than any other Agent General in the eighteenth century. His work as a whole appears to have

⁹Louis S. Greenbaum, Talleyrand, Statesman-Priest: The Agent General of the Clergy and the Church of France at the End of the Old Regime, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 1.

been achieved with an almost obsessional sense of institutional inviolability. "To him each possession and privilege constituted a sacred and immutable charge if the clerical patrimony was to remain a cumulative inheritance and an autonomous spiritual and temporal force," Greenbaum argues.¹⁰

In his confrontations with the ablest ministers of the state - Vergennes, Necker and Calonne - Talleyrand appeared more attuned to the spirit of St. Louis than of Voltaire, using "old-fashioned arguments about the inalienability of the clergy's temporal and its tax immunities."¹¹ Greenbaum's summary of Talleyrand's remarkable achievements are worthy of quoting at length:

[He] proved a model Agent-General who spared no resource to protect the . . . First Estate. To Talleyrand, . . . can be traced . . . the maintenance of its privileges, jurisdiction, and fortune against attacks from inside the Church and out. . . .

No one in the order of the clergy in the waning Old Regime better divined the source of the clergy's reverses vis a vis the State, and no one worked harder for appropriate reforms to overcome them.¹²

Talleyrand's able service preserved the Church's privileges and exemptions during his tenure, yet it also achieved his personal goals. He became the Bishop of Autun on 16 January 1789.

Historians have composed volumes to explain the series of events which led to the French Revolution in 1789. Social, cultural, economic, and intellectual explanations for the causes of the Revolution abound. Talleyrand's Memoirs, written with the alleged purpose of providing a

¹⁰Ibid., 210.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 203, 211.

'true' history, contain a valuable commentary on the work of these future historians:

If historians make it a point to seek the men to whom they can award the honour, or address the reproach of having made, directed, or modified, the French Revolution, they will give themselves unnecessary trouble. It had no authors, leaders, nor guides. It was sown by the writers who, in an enlightened and venturesome century, wishing to attack prejudices, subverted the religious and social principles, and by unskillful ministers who increased the deficit of the treasury and the discontent of the people.¹³

Talleyrand, a key actor in the early years of the revolution, showed a remarkable understanding of problems which have only recently been thoroughly grasped by historians. The Enlightenment did not cause the events of 1789 but merely sowed the seeds of discontent with established religious, social, and political principles which awaited the proper conjuncture of events. The fiscal disasters caused by either incompetent finance ministers or an incompetent king could have been contained short of revolution without the influence of these enlightened ideas. Although the state was faced with bankruptcy, this crisis of state alone could not have been a sufficient cause for a total revolution without an elite leadership informed by the ideas of the Enlightenment and with the discontent of the people which Talleyrand has succinctly noted. However, the inability of the leaders of 1789 to give France an enduring constitutional monarchy, as Talleyrand himself desired, may explain his somewhat simplistic claim that the revolution had neither leaders nor guides. Perhaps their inability to exercise their political virtue in the moment made the efforts of subsequent leaders difficult to acknowledge.

¹³Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 163.

But what of the elite leadership provided to the revolutionary fervor by the members of the Estates General and National Assembly? Talleyrand discounts the role of these men in leading, directing, or modifying the course of events. In penetrating his reasons for denying that leadership of those events was possible, a better grasp of his own sense of virtue can be gained. Talleyrand did affect the course of events in the early years of the revolution, especially in contradiction to the steps he had taken as Agent-General of the Clergy. This conflict between the traditional rights and privileges of Catholicism - and his role as their defender - with the newly found power and responsibility of the Estates General to address the government's fiscal problems placed the newly elected representative of the First Estate in the Estates General in a classic double bind. Whom should he serve?

Apparently, Talleyrand feared from the outset that the Third Estate posed the only real threat to the sovereignty of the King and, therefore, proposed that the Estates General be dismissed in order to prevent the Third from assuming a predominant role.¹⁴ This proposal fits nicely with the thesis that Talleyrand consistently sought to restore a constitutional monarchy balanced by a restored nobility rather than truly democratic forms. When royal dismissal of the Estates was deemed at the time to be too risky by the Court, "there remained but one reasonable course to take, it was to yield without being forced to do so, and while there would still be some credit in doing it. . . . I did not hesitate, therefore, to join the men who set this example."¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., 94.

¹⁵Ibid.

Talleyrand's narrative shifts to the present tense following this sentence, showing that decades later the events were still so fresh in his mind that they seemed to still be in process. Following the Tennis Court Oath, he claimed, many of the nobles abandoned the king and the emigration began *en masse*.

At this point, Talleyrand's sense of political virtu came to the fore. Flight from France absent of the threat of personal danger was beyond his comprehension.

I resolved . . . not to leave France, until constrained to do so by personal danger; . . . but to hold myself in a position enabling me to save those who could be saved, to raise no obstacle between opportunity and myself, and to hold myself in readiness for it.¹⁶

The tide of revolutionary events rose rapidly, and Talleyrand noted that soon "the torrent formed by ignorance and passion was so violent that it was impossible to stem it."¹⁷ In order to survive and salvage what could best serve the safety and security of France, he claimed to have played a passive part in the events which followed over the next two years.¹⁸

In fact, Talleyrand played a most active role in the National and Constituent Assemblies. On July 7, 1789, he proposed the nullification of the imperative mandates of the cahiers.¹⁹ On the thirteenth of that month, the day before the fall of the Bastille, he was among those elected to draft a Constitution. He urged the suppression of tithes,

¹⁶Ibid., 98.

¹⁷Ibid., 102.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹For Talleyrand's actions in the Assemblies in this and the subsequent paragraph I am indebted to an editor's footnote in his *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 102.

caused the adoption of certain articles of the declaration of rights, and proposed measures to ensure a loan to remedy the deficit in August 1789. Most significantly for the current research, on October 10 he proposed the confiscation and sale of church lands to supply the needs of the state. Before the end of 1789, he presented a police regulation for the city of Paris, proposed to make an inventory of church property, was appointed to examine the affairs of the Bank of Discount, and rendered a statement of that examination.

The next year, 1790, Talleyrand played an even more active role in the affairs of the state, working to avoid the potential of unrest and anarchy at home. He proposed the following during that year: to consider the Jews as citizens; to draft an address to the people to achieve calmness; to devise a method for the sale and transfer of church lands; and to achieve the recoinage of money. The Constituent Assembly elected him president over Sieyes by a margin of 373 votes to 125. In revolutionary France, it would be difficult to claim that the role of President of the Assembly was a passive part. He opposed the issue of two billion francs and, early in 1791, caused the adoption of a law on the unification of weights and measures. That year he also reported on religious freedom to the Assembly and drew up a report on public education.

Why then does Talleyrand claim to have played a passive part during these early years? The section of the Memoirs covering the years of the Revolution were written during the Bourbon Restoration. This explains some of Talleyrand's effort to claim an inactive role. He only mentions five matters, all relative to state finance, upon which he

believed he ought to speak: opposition to the creation of paper money, reduction of the interest on the national debt, the establishment of a National Bank, establishment of a uniform system of weights and measures, and the report of the Committee on Public Instruction.²⁰

Although his participation in many of the other events presented an embarrassment to the Foreign Minister of the restored monarchy, such as helping to draft a constitution and presiding over the Assembly, his role in such affairs was well known to any with even a casual acquaintance with the events of those days. Louis XVIII certainly was not to be duped into believing Talleyrand's part was passive. Perhaps part of his apparent reticence on his part in these revolutionary years was that by 1815 he had learned that the most effective means for him to exercise his political virtu and influence the course of events occurred behind the scenes rather than on center stage.

Even more significant than his refusal to admit to an active role regarding the formation of a new, revolutionary government for France proves to be his failure to mention his actions against the master to whom he had taken solemn oaths of allegiance as priest and bishop - the Catholic Church. The former Agent General of the Clergy, the Bishop of Autun, rose on October 10, 1789, and proposed to the National Assembly that "the noblest homage that can be paid to religion, is to contribute to the formation of a state of social order which should foster and protect the virtues religion ordains and rewards [sic]."²¹ In a direct reversal of his Lockean arguments regarding the sanctity of property

²⁰Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 102.

²¹M. Colmache, Reminiscences of the Prince Talleyrand (London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1848), vol. 1, 319.

when Agent-General, he stated that "it is evident that the clergy is not a proprietor in the same sense that others are; since the property of which they have use . . . was given to them not for their personal benefit but for the exercise of an office or function."²² Ferrieres described in detail Talleyrand's motion:

The Bishop of Autun . . . proposed declaring that all ecclesiastical property belonged to the nation, with the obligation of providing the revenues necessary to the maintenance of the church and the clergy; . . . the nation should take upon itself the payment of the ecclesiastics, take charge of hospitals and schools, and thus carry out the intentions of the founders. . . . [He] said that eighty millions would be appropriated to the ministers of the Catholic cult; that the nation would pay the debts of the clergy; that the landed property, put on sale, would produce a capital of two billion one hundred millions.²³

During the fervor of the revolutionary days, the young bishop knew of the financial peril which threatened the state of France. He further knew that it was the continued existence of France that was at stake, whether her government be that of a monarchy or a republic. As William Doyle notes in The Oxford History of the French Revolution,

the short-term debt alone was estimated at over 707 millions in November 1789, and by the following summer it was believed to be not far short of two billions In these circumstances the deputies turned to a measure far beyond anything ever contemplated by Necker. They decided to nationalize the lands of the Church.

. . . . On 10 October Talleyrand lent his authority as a bishop to a formal proposal that the state should take over all clerical property. Two-thirds of it . . . should be used to pay the clergy, [and] . . . the remainder should help restore the national finances.²⁴

²²Quoted in Simon Schama, Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1989), 351.

²³Quoted in Earl Leroy Higgins, ed., The French Revolution as Told by Contemporaries (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1938), 144.

²⁴William Doyle, The Oxford History of the French Revolution (Oxford: University Press, 1989), 132.

A similar situation is what prompted Machiavelli's political writings according to Pocock - the threat to the continued existence of the Florentine republic. This threat is what constitutes the first meaning of the term "Machiavellian Moment" for Pocock.²⁵ Most importantly, Talleyrand had first hand knowledge of the tremendous wealth available in the vast, privileged wealth and resources of the First Estate. This knowledge he put to use in the proposal for the confiscation and sale of church lands, which sale in fact saved France for the time being from financial disaster and ruin.

As Greenbaum notes

Within a decade the priest who had been the pride of his order and the uncompromising champion of its privileges became in the popular image the Judas who provided its disestablishment. The young acolyte who had entered the Church without love was prepared to leave as a liberated prelate without hate. . . . His future professional ambitions were national statesmanship, political economy, and diplomacy; and his new patron, to replace the one he helped dispatch, was the State.²⁶

Talleyrand's betrayal of the church is familiar to every student of the French Revolution. The long-term ambiguity of his actions, and his struggle with the issues of virtue and morals which vied within him, are less discussed.

The influence of the enlightened ideals of Voltaire are evident in the actions of Talleyrand from 1789-91. From Voltaire's common sense argument that "there should be but one weight, one measure, one custom,"²⁷ which Talleyrand proposed to the National Assembly, to his

²⁵J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton: University Press, 1987), vii.

²⁶Greenbaum, 215-6.

²⁷Quoted in Higgins, 35.

attitudes toward the proper function of the church, Talleyrand's reforms often followed Voltaire's advice. The temporal affairs of the church with which Talleyrand was so familiar had been very much a concern of Voltaire. Voltaire argued that "no ecclesiastical law should have any force except it have the express sanction of the government."²⁸ Further, he reasoned that the privileged status of the clergy had no rational foundation, and that "all ecclesiastics should be subject in all cases to the government, because they are subjects of the state."²⁹ Voltaire forcefully put forth the argument which Talleyrand and the National Assembly followed that the clergy and the church should be subordinate to the state in all its affairs:

Religion exists only to keep mankind in order, and to make men merit the goodness of God by their virtue. . . .

The priests are persons established under the authority of the sovereign to direct . . . religious worship. . . . These ecclesiastics are not the Church. . . . If the ecclesiastics . . . had acquired rights which might trouble or destroy society, these rights ought to be suppressed. . . .

Obedience to ecclesiastical order must consequently always be free and voluntary: no other should be possible. Submission, on the other hand, to civil order may be coerced and compulsory. . . .

From this it results obviously that the authority of the clergy is and can be spiritual only; that it should not have any temporal power; that no coercive force is proper to its ministry, which would be destroyed by it.³⁰

The nationalization of the church and the confiscation and sale of church lands proposed and actively pursued by Talleyrand with the aid of Mirabeau and others falls solidly within the purview of Voltaire's philosophy of church-state relations. Yet in his old age, when

²⁸Ibid., 34.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Voltaire, Philosophical Dictionary, trans. H.I. Woolf (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1924), 103-4.

composing his Memoirs, Talleyrand refused to even acknowledge his deeds in this important phase of the early revolution. He utters no apology nor defense but merely omits any reference whatsoever to these actions.

While Talleyrand fails to mention his role in the Assembly regarding the church, he does give a lengthy defense of another episode of defying the church - the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. His proud recollection of the reconciliation of the French Government with church via the Concordat of 1801 provides an interesting insight into the struggle in which he engaged over the conflicts between tradition and enlightenment. One of the few times he acknowledges that any of his actions were errant is regarding the Civil Constitution:

I do not hesitate to acknowledge here, whatever share I may have taken in this work, that the civil constitution of the clergy, decreed by the constituent assembly, was perhaps the greatest political error of that assembly, independent of the frightful crimes which were its consequence.³¹

Talleyrand claimed that the proposal of the civil constitution provoked repugnance in him. While he does not bear the responsibility for the authorship of that document, without his services in passing on the episcopal character to the new Bishops, it would have been null and void.

The Civil Constitution required an oath from the clergy to conform to it under pain of being considered to have resigned if one refused to take it. The vast majority of French bishops refused to take the oath. Without a bishop confirmed by the Roman Church to pass on the episcopal character to Bishops elected under the new regulations, the church's split with Rome would have taken on a tenor of Protestantism akin to

³¹Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 94.

Anglicanism or Presbyterianism. The schism with Rome would be complete without the laying on of hands continuing the succession of Bishops since Peter. This was to be avoided by any and all means, even for the revolutionaries. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, passed on July 12, 1790, specified that every newly elected bishop had to present himself "to his metropolitan bishop . . . and request him to grant canonical confirmation."³²

On February 24, 1791, Talleyrand came forward to consecrate the new bishops, passing on the blessing of the Catholic church. The defense of his decision to do so is significant:

If no one could be found to confer [the episcopal character] upon them [the newly-elected bishops], it was greatly to be feared, not that all religion would be proscribed, as came to pass a few years after, but, what seemed to me more dangerous seeing that it might have been more lasting, that the Assembly, by the doctrines it had sanctioned, might soon force the country into Presbyterianism, . . . and that France could not be drawn back to Catholicism, whose hierarchy and forms are in harmony with those of the monarchical system. I lent, therefore, my services to consecrate one of the newly-elected bishops, who, in his turn, consecrated the others.³³

The concern for the state and her church come through the jumbled, multi-phrase sentence. The complexity of the syntax belies Talleyrand's struggle to come to grips with this all-important decision in his life. His defense of Catholicism, most significantly, has no basis in its truth as a religious system. Rather, Catholicism was essential for France because its "hierarchy and forms are in harmony with the monarchical system." The various orders of the church served as a sort

³²The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, Title II, Article 16. In John Hall Stewart, A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution (NY: The MacMillan Co., 1951), 175.

³³Ibid., vol. 1, 103.

of Nobility within Catholicism, tending the flock of commoners under the sole ruling head, the king of the Church on Earth: the pope.

Talleyrand's role in the civil Constitution thus was determined by his supreme desire for France to maintain a constitutional monarchy. The importance of his action struck home immediately: Talleyrand resigned his bishopric and abandoned his first career and master. On March 10, 1791, a fortnight after Talleyrand had consecrated the constitutional bishops, the pope issued a brief of excommunication.³⁴

While Talleyrand fails to mention his excommunication, it proved to be a pivotal event in his life. His struggle to become reinstated in the good graces of the church form a central concern of the conclusion to this thesis. In his narrative of the events of the revolution, he merely notes that he resigned his bishopric following the consecration of the constitutional bishops. He explains that

the Revolution promised new destinies for the nation; I followed its course and ran my chances. I devoted to it the best of all my energies, being resolved to serve my country for herself. . . . This explains how and why, at several periods, I entered, and re-entered public life; it also throws light on the part I have played.³⁵

This paragraph comes as close as any to a self-defense in the whole of the Memoirs. The explanation that he rode the tide of the course of events in hopes of serving France reflect the influence of Machiavelli's virtu on the career of the diplomat. The desire for France to have a constitutional monarchy with a powerful elite of nobles or notables proves to be the one constant in Talleyrand's career.

³⁴Louis Madelin, Talleyrand: A Vivid Biography of the Amoral, Unscrupulous and Fascinating French Statesman (New York: Roy Publishers, 1948), 37.

³⁵Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 104.

Talleyrand's ability to serve France rapidly diminished as the structure of power changed. By August 1792 he had sought and obtained a temporary diplomatic mission to London to establish a uniform system of weights and measures for adoption by the various governments of Europe. He confesses that the mission concealed his true purpose. "My real object was, however, to leave France, where it seemed to me useless, and even dangerous, to stay any longer, but I wished to leave the country with a regular passport, in order that it should not be closed to me for ever."³⁶

Talleyrand's exit could not have been more timely. He recognized the threat that the revolution proved soon to pose to men of his ilk under the Republic of Virtue and the Terror. He noted that

the words of Republic, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, were everywhere inscribed on all the walls, but the ideas and feelings they expressed were nowhere to be met with. From the highest authorities to those of the lowest rank, there was scarcely one that was not most arbitrary in its formation, its composition and mode of action. All was done with violence, and, as a natural consequence, nothing could last.³⁷

For new opportunities to practice his virtue in the service of France, Talleyrand knew that he must bide his time and wait for another change in government which would allow him access to power and the possibility to return France to monarchical forms. The rise of the Directory proved to be the opportunity for his return to France and to power.

³⁶Ibid., 169.

³⁷Ibid., 194.

CHAPTER 3 - A STAB IN THE BACK? NAPOLEON'S FOREIGN MINISTER, THE BOURBON RESTORATION AND THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

The remarkable shift in allegiance Talleyrand exhibited between his efforts as Agent-General and his work in the National Assembly appears to be a template for his later political life. Yet as has been argued, the goal of providing France with a constitutional monarchy forms the foundation of a political virtu which undergirded Talleyrand's choices in that apparent shift of allegiance. A second significant shift which has troubled his biographers occurred after Talleyrand found himself again in power in France. As Napoleon's Foreign Minister he issued the proclamation announcing the emperor's overthrow, welcomed the allies into the heart of Paris, ushered in the Bourbon Restoration of Louis XVIII, and represented the new monarchy at the Congress of Vienna. Writing much of his memoirs during the Restoration, how could Talleyrand possibly justify his service to Napoleon, even in terms of the goal of a constitutional monarchy? Further, if that justification proves viable, how could he excuse himself for betraying the emperor who had rewarded his services with appointments as Grand Chamberlain and Prince of Benevet? Once again, the problem of virtu arises in the tumultuous public career of this remarkable statesman.

The government of France under the Directory returned a measure of stability to a country rent by the Terror and the Thermidorian reaction. This stability, although temporary, provided a climate in France for Talleyrand's return. Following the elections of the Year V, in March

and April 1797,¹ one of the Directors, Barras, approached Talleyrand and asked him to serve as the Minister of Foreign Relations for the Directory.² During the summer of 1797, Talleyrand assumed his new post. In defense of his acceptance of a position of power under yet another government, Talleyrand reveals much of his sense of virtue in public service:

It must be borne in mind that, by declining official posts, in times of upheaval, one simply affords greater facilities to the enemies of public order. He who accepts does so, not to second the advocates of a state of affairs to which he is opposed, but in order to so modify their action that it may be profitable to the future. "En toute chose IL faut considerer la fin," said good old La Fontaine, and that is not a mere apologue.³

Talleyrand, indeed, followed that advice in most situations. He certainly never refused any post which could gain him the opportunity to serve France as he envisioned her true service, providing for public order under monarchical forms.

Talleyrand's acceptance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 18, 1797,⁴ and his return to power, coincide with the dramatic rise of another son of "nobility" to leadership in France: Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon's notable success in the Italian campaign and the preliminary negotiation of the Treaty of Campo Formio occurred just prior to Talleyrand's appointment. That historic treaty was officially consummated three months later, on October 17, 1797.⁵

¹William Doyle, The Oxford History of the French Revolution (Oxford: University Press, 1989), 327-9.

²Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, Prince de Benevet, Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, trans. Ms. Angus Hall, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 190. Subsequent references to the Memoirs will be noted as: Talleyrand, Memoirs, volume number, page number.

³Ibid., 191-2. "In all things the end should be considered."

⁴Ibid., 193.

⁵Ibid.

The stability of the government under the Directory proved tenuous at best, and Talleyrand looked for any opportunity to protect himself.

As he recalled,

The Directory shared the fate of all despots. So long as their armies were victorious, people hated their rule but feared their power. . . . As soon as the hour of defeat came, that government met with universal contempt. . . . This offered the opportunity I was looking for of resigning my post. . . .

The intention I had had for a long time of resigning had induced me to take certain precautions. I had acquainted General Bonaparte with my resolution before his departure for Egypt.⁶

Talleyrand again proved to be a shrewd judge of the political situation in France. He resigned his ministry under the Directory, with Napoleon's foreknowledge, on July 20, 1799.⁷ Less than four months later, his confidant successfully seized power in the coup d'etat of 18 Brumaire (November 9, 1799). Once more, Talleyrand had cast his lot with the ultimate victor, and "ten or twelve days later [28 or 30 Brumaire], I again became Foreign Secretary,"⁸ this time for the Consulate.

At this juncture in his Memoirs, Talleyrand proceeds to give a lengthy defense of his support for Napoleon. Much of this defense has been discounted by his biographers since it was composed during the Restoration. However, throughout his career he consistently sought the goal of establishing the ideals of a constitutional monarchy. His participation in the early stages of the revolution, and his flight from France during the republican phases, bear out his assertions that

⁶Ibid., 202-3.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 207.

it became necessary either to re-establish monarchy or else to have made the 18 Brumaire in vain

The passing from polygarchy to hereditary monarchy could not be immediate, the result being, as a necessary consequence, that the re-establishment of the latter and the re-establishment of the house of Bourbon could not be simultaneous. . . . It was [therefore] necessary to make a temporary sovereign who might become sovereign for life, and eventually hereditary monarch. The question was not whether Bonaparte had the qualities most desirable in a monarch; he had unquestionably those which were indispensable to again accustom France to monarchical discipline, as she was still infatuated with every revolutionary doctrine; and no one possessed those qualities in the same degree as he did.⁹

Talleyrand believed that Napoleon's ability to accustom France to a hereditary monarchy could result in the restoration of what he believed to be the best form of government: a constitutional monarchy. This was instrumental in serving the same purpose as the state church which Talleyrand also supported.

One may not always have agreed as to the excellence of the means resorted to by Bonaparte, but the utility of the aim could not be contested, being simply, on the one hand to bring foreign wars to an end, and, on the other hand, to close the revolutionary era by re-establishing monarchy, which, in my candid opinion, it was then impossible to do in favour of the legitimate heirs of the last king.¹⁰

Taking an early utilitarian approach, Talleyrand considered the peace and security of France as his driving political principle. The rise of Bonaparte and the nationalization of the church both provided the means to this ultimate end.

The explanation which Talleyrand gives for his service to Napoleon thus fits within his guiding principles. Yet what of his change of allegiance in the waning years of the Empire? Although he turned on the emperor in 1814, he had left Napoleon's service in an official capacity

⁹Ibid., 207-8.

¹⁰Ibid., 219.

in 1807. Talleyrand claims to have served the emperor with fidelity and zeal at all times while he had the charge of foreign affairs. During his tenure, he also claims that Napoleon adhered for a long time to the course which his foreign minister plotted. That course was based upon two considerations: "to establish for France monarchical institutions . . . , [and] to spare Europe in order that the Powers might pardon France her achievements and glory."¹¹ By 1807, however, Talleyrand believed that Napoleon had already begun to veer away from the course which France should take and that Talleyrand suggested. Napoleon had started down the road away from monarchical principles and toward engendering bitter feelings of vengeance in the other powers in Europe. Talleyrand's opposition to Napoleon centered on the Emperor's Spanish policy, which Talleyrand consistently fought against. The treachery of the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau which Napoleon arranged with Spain in order to gain free access to that country prior to establishing direct control over it was the last straw.¹² Talleyrand therefore resigned his post as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1807.¹³

Talleyrand consistently maintained that the best interests of France would be served only through a general peace in Europe. The disastrous involvement in foreign wars throughout the revolutionary period confirmed his opinion. As he composed the Memoirs, he reflected that Napoleon was "the first and only man, who could have given to Europe the real equilibrium for which she has been searching in vain for

¹¹Ibid., 239.

¹²Duff Cooper, Talleyrand (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1932, 1967), 163-7. The Treaty was signed in October 1797.

¹³Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 1, 239.

several centuries [sic]."¹⁴ He based his desire for a European equilibrium and peace on his own view of an ethical principle. He claimed that

with a real equilibrium, Napoleon would have been able to give to the peoples of Europe an organization consonant with true moral law. A real equilibrium would have rendered war well nigh impossible. A suitable organization would have carried to every household the highest degree of civilization which could possibly be attained. [emphasis added]¹⁵

Here Talleyrand plainly spells out his understanding of the true moral law necessary for Europe: an organization which would establish equilibrium, peace and prosperity for all of Europe, especially for his beloved France. Although the emperor did achieve short periods of peace, his grand designs prevented him from achieving Talleyrand's goal of a lasting institution to insure an equilibrium. Talleyrand himself proved the person responsible for establishing such an equilibrium after the downfall of the emperor in his role in the Concert of Europe.

Talleyrand's apparent betrayal of yet another master, as was the case with his actions regarding the church, can thus be seen as founded upon his political virtu. Again, that virtu once more demonstrated the virtuosity of Machiavelli's Prince. The concern of the Enlightenment for the judgment of posterity as the source of virtue shines through in the Prince of Benevet's ultimate appraisal of the man whose potential had so stirred his hopes for a European equilibrium.

Posterity will say of him [Napoleon] 'That man was endowed with a very great intellectual force; but he has not understood veritable glory. His moral force was very small or even null. He was not able to enjoy prosperity . . . and

¹⁴Ibid., vol. 2, 99.

¹⁵Ibid.

it is because he lacked moral force, that he caused the ruin of Europe and of himself [sic]. . . .

Napoleon vanquished, was doomed to disappear from the world's stage; that is the destiny of vanquished usurpers [sic].¹⁶

Napoleon, once Talleyrand's hope to become an hereditary monarch, because of his increasingly despotic policies, now appears only as a usurper, a pretender to the throne destined to vanish now that he no longer served the true interests of France.

In such a situation, Talleyrand's decision to announce the overthrow of the emperor logically follows from his political virtu. With France threatened by invasion in 1813 and 1814, the threat against her very survival from foreign invasion was great. He argued that the crucial factor in making his decision revolved around the question of how the Allied Powers would decide to treat with France. "Would they continue to treat with him [Napoleon]? Would another government be imposed on France, or . . . would they deliver her up to an anarchy of which it was impossible to calculate the results?"¹⁷ Again we see Talleyrand acting in a French Machiavellian moment where the survival of France appeared to him to be threatened by either foreign invasion or anarchy at home, or both.

Based on reports from his contacts with the various allies, Talleyrand concluded that until March 15, 1814, a fortnight before their entry into Paris, the powers were united in their decision to treat with Napoleon. Further, Napoleon alone thus bore the responsibility for his own fall from power though his obstinacy in refusing to negotiate in the face of overwhelming military force. Finally, the peril in which France

¹⁶Ibid., 100-1.

¹⁷Ibid., 110-1.

found herself also rested squarely on the shoulders of the emperor. As the Allies entered Paris on March 31, 1814, they had yet to decide the fate that awaited France.¹⁸

Talleyrand, based upon his sense of public virtue, thus decided that "it became more pressing every hour to prepare a government that could be rapidly substituted for the one that was falling to pieces."¹⁹ The question focused on what would be best for France and for Europe.

France, in the midst of the horror of an invasion, wished to be free and respected. This was equivalent to wishing for the return of the House of Bourbon in the order prescribed by legitimacy. Europe, still anxious, in the midst of France, wished her to disarm, and to resume her former limits, so that peace should no longer need to be constantly guarded. She required for that guarantees: this was also to wish for the return of the House of Bourbon.²⁰

Talleyrand thus asserted that the needs of France and Europe coincided both with one another and with the political goals and virtue of Talleyrand. The Bourbon Restoration "alone could avert that vengeance that twenty years of violence had heaped up against her."²¹

The allies, however, were not so unified in the desire for the return of the Bourbons. Talleyrand again exercised his diplomatic virtue in securing his ends by bringing the victorious allies around to his desires. Pitt's plenipotentiary, Lord Castlereagh, stated flatly that he would remain opposed "to any step which should, even in appearance, mix our system with that of the Bourbons."²² Harold Nicolson has argued that Castlereagh "shared the Tsar's doubts regarding the

¹⁸Ibid., 116.

¹⁹Ibid., 117.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Quoted in Harold Nicolson, The Congress of Vienna (New York: The Viking Press, 1946, 1961), 88.

competence of Louis XVIII and his family; he shared Metternich's suspicions that the French army, and a large section of the French public, remained loyal to Bonaparte."²³ However, the decision on the fate of France depended in the two weeks following the capitulation of Paris on less than the full complement of representatives of the allies.

Nicolson notes that of the representatives of the four powers, only Alexander and Frederick William entered Paris during the fortnight between the capitulation of Paris on March 21, 1814, and the ratification of the Treaty of Fontainebleau by Napoleon on April 13. Further, "King Frederick William scarcely counted. . . . the King of Prussia took little part in politics. The question whether the Bourbons should or should not be restored to the throne of France therefore rested, during those crucial days . . . , with the Tsar of Russia alone."²⁴ At this juncture, Talleyrand asserted himself with his Machiavellian virtu to obtain the constitutional monarchy under a Bourbon restoration which he believed could alone avert the vengeance of the allies. As Nicolson has argued, "He was the one man who . . . was coldly determined on the overthrow of the Bonaparte dynasty and the restoration of the Bourbons."²⁵

Upon his arrival at Talleyrand's Chateau on the Rue St. Florentin, the Tsar Alexander uttered words that were to be more prophetic than he could have wished. Regarding the immediate future of France, the Tsar placed his confidence in Talleyrand.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 87.

²⁵Ibid., 85.

"Monsieur de Talleyrand," he [the Tsar] said on dismounting, "I have decided to stay in your house since you possess my confidence and that of my allies. We do not wish to settle anything until we have heard your views. You know France, her needs and her desires. Say what we should do, and we shall do it."²⁶

As the eventual negotiations at Vienna were to prove, Talleyrand maintained to a great extent the role thus assigned him as final arbiter for the future of France and Europe.

The moral force of the principle of legitimacy, became for Talleyrand a focus for veneration in that it provided an ethical and moral foundation for that "good of France" he had consistently sought in his public career: a return to a constitutional monarchy under the influence of men such as himself. While he used legitimacy along with his Machiavellian virtu in the negotiations at the Congress of Vienna, the moral nature of legitimacy undergirded his own virtu as a public servant of France and of Europe. Once again he noted in the Memoirs that in 1814

the first need of Europe, her greatest interest, was . . . to banish the doctrines of usurpation, and to revive the principle of legitimacy, the only remedy for all the evils which had overwhelmed her

The legitimacy of kings, or . . . of governments, is the safeguard of nations. *That is the reason why it is sacred.* [emphasis added]²⁷

After the upheaval of the revolution and the ultimately disastrous ambition of Napoleon's foreign wars for France, this belief in a stabilizing force to be found in legitimacy was logically evident. For the safety of France and the peace of Europe, stable governments must be founded. The doctrine of legitimacy provided the basis for Talleyrand's

²⁶Quoted in Nicolson, 86.

²⁷Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 119-20.

efforts to secure that foundation for France and Europe. Talleyrand's above expression of his belief in the sacred nature of the principle of legitimacy is followed very closely in the Memoirs by a reference to the sources of some of his understanding of political virtue. In discussing the reasons why the usurper Napoleon was destined to vanish from the world stage, and why the revolution turned to regicide, Talleyrand notes that

that is why Machiaveli [sic] says in his book of *The Prince*, that the usurper could not firmly establish his power, if he did not take the life of all the members of the family which reigned legitimately. Therefore, this is why the Revolution would have the blood of all the Bourbons.²⁸

Although it is highly improbable that Talleyrand could ever have supported such a measure, he recognized from his understanding of Machiavelli that the only chance Napoleon, or the revolution, had of enduring success was in the elimination of all of the House of Bourbon. Legitimacy, however, demanded the return of monarchy to France, and Talleyrand bent all his efforts to accomplish the restoration of the Bourbons to a constitutional monarchy.

On the first of April, 1814, Talleyrand "had the honour to be placed by the senate's decree . . . at the head of the provisory government, which for a few days conducted the affairs of France."²⁹ What an eventful few days it proved to be! The following day, April 2, 1814, he convened the Senate and personally presented a document for each member of that body to sign. That same evening, at seven o'clock, he carried the document to the Tsar Alexander. The document "was that

²⁸Ibid., 120.

²⁹Ibid., 126.

which pronounced the overthrow of Napoleon, and the restoration of the Bourbons with constitutional guarantees."³⁰ Four days later, April 6, 1814, the Senate under Talleyrand's direction voted in favor of the new Constitution. Legitimacy of the succession of the House of Bourbon was assured by the second article, which read in part: "'The French people freely call to the throne of France Louis-Stanislas-Xavier of France, brother of the last King - and after him the other members of the House of Bourbon in the old order.'"³¹ Talleyrand's virtu placed the throne of France again in the hands of the Bourbons, with constitutional limitations on their power. Talleyrand's goals for France had been achieved.

The new king appointed Talleyrand immediately to his old post as Minister of Foreign Affairs on April 23, 1814. Prior to Louis XVIII's arrival in Paris, Talleyrand had to negotiate with the Allies and sign a preliminary treaty. The extent of territory and the limitations on the throne the newly restored monarch was to assume depended almost entirely on Talleyrand. His efforts over the next two years provided the stage upon which he demonstrated the magnitude of his diplomatic virtu.

His position was not an enviable one. He described the condition of France in his memoirs as desperate. She had been invaded on all her borders by innumerable armies composed of men "completely animated with the spirit of hate and vengeance" rather than of mercenaries.³² This hate and vengeance flowed from the

³⁰Ibid., 123.

³¹Quoted in Nicolson, 93.

³²Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 130.

twenty years [that] these people had seen their territories occupied and ravaged by the French armies; they had been oppressed by every means, insulted, treated with the most profound contempt; . . . and yet, if they resolved to wreak their vengeance, what had France to oppose to them?³³

The French armies were weakened and dispersed, devoid of coherent leadership. Under such circumstances Talleyrand had to negotiate with the victorious powers in the very heart of France. Just as his proposal to confiscate church lands occurred in a climate of fiscal peril for France, his role in the Restoration and negotiations for peace proceeded in a France imperiled by conquering armies. And, once again, his apparent shift in allegiance proved vital to the survival of France - the principle which guided his public life.

Talleyrand not only secured the continued existence of his beloved France in the face of vengeful foes, he also managed to maintain her status as a great power in the peace negotiations which ensued at the Congress of Vienna in the fall of 1814. This feat is all the more remarkable in light of a secret article of the Peace of Paris, whereby the members of the Quadruple Alliance - Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia - secretly reserved for themselves the final decision in all important matters.³⁴ This article had not been communicated to, much less accepted by, France or the lesser powers present at the Congress. As Nicolson has noted, "Talleyrand was quick to exploit this anomaly for his own advantage. . . . It was a position from which Talleyrand only allowed them [the Quadruple Alliance] to extricate themselves at the price of admitting France into their inner council."³⁵ He skillfully

³³Ibid.

³⁴Nicolson, 135.

³⁵Ibid., 137.

manipulated the other negotiators at the Congress from the moment of his arrival in Vienna.

Talleyrand detailed these first diplomatic victories in a letter to Louis XVIII dated October 4, 1814, a mere four days after the scheduled opening of the Congress. He relates his first meeting with the representatives of the Quadruple Alliance, who summoned him to appear before them. The British plenipotentiary, Lord Castlereagh, handed him a protocol intended to "make you [Talleyrand] acquainted with what the four Courts have done since we have been here."³⁶ Upon reading the document, Talleyrand noted that "the word 'allies' occurred in every paragraph. I pointed out the word, and . . . [asked] whether peace had not been made, whether there was any quarrel, and with whom."³⁷ He boldly argued that

it is no longer against Napoleon - he is on the isle of Elba . . . it is no longer against France; for peace has been made . . . it is surely not against the King of France; he is a guarantee of that peace. Gentlemen, let us speak frankly; if there are still *allied powers*, I am one too many here.³⁸

The response of the ministers was that the word had been used for brevity's sake. Talleyrand replied that brevity "ought not to be purchased at the expense of accuracy."³⁹

Upon reading the protocol, Talleyrand realized its true intent: to allow the four 'allies' to make all of the major decisions of the

³⁶Talleyrand, The Correspondence of Prince Talleyrand and King Louis XVIII (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1881), 15.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 203.

³⁹Talleyrand, Correspondence, 15.

conference without the participation of France or any of the lesser Powers. He read the document twice, repeatedly murmuring

I do not understand. . . . I hold to two dates between which there is nothing; that of the 31st of May on which the formation of the Congress was stipulated [by the Peace of Paris], and that of the 1st of October, on which it ought to meet. All that has been done in the interval is foreign to me, and does not exist for me.⁴⁰

He continued the argument with an appeal to principle, right, and the sacred nature of legitimacy:

Gentlemen, I am perhaps the only one who asks nothing. Great esteem is all I would have for France. . . . I want nothing, I repeat it, but I bring you a great deal. The presence of a minister of Louis XVIII consecrates here the principle upon which all social order rests. The first need of Europe is to banish for ever the opinion that right can be acquired by conquest alone, and to cause the revival of that sacred principle of legitimacy from which all order and stability spring. To show to-day that France troubles your deliberations, would be to say that true principles are no longer the only ones that guide you, and that you are unwilling to be just; but that idea is far from me, for we all equally feel that a simple and straightforward path is alone worthy of the noble mission we have to fulfil [sic].⁴¹

As Nicolson observed, "the Big Four could find no reply to this argument. They agreed to tear up the protocol which they had signed and to start, with Talleyrand's assistance, all over again."⁴²

From that point on, France and Talleyrand took part in all the decisions of the Congress. "Thus," Talleyrand proudly recalled,

the house of Bourbon . . . and France herself, who had been conquered five months previously, found themselves already replaced to their proper place in Europe, and had again regained that influence that belonged to them, in the most important deliberations of the congress.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., 16.

⁴¹Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 203.

⁴²Nicolson, 142.

⁴³Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 205.

After exploiting the position of the lesser powers' champion at the Congress to prevent the exclusion of France at the negotiating table, the aging Machiavellian rapidly abandoned his smaller allies and assumed for France the role of the fifth Great Power at the Congress. Nicolson again succinctly described the full import of Talleyrand's diplomatic victory at the opening of the conference.

There was a real danger that the four victorious Allies, under pressure from Russia and Prussia, would seek to impose their will upon the whole Congress. There was a real danger that, if this occurred, Metternich would surrender to the combined power of Russian and Prussia and that Castlereagh, without support at home, would find himself in a permanent minority of one. By exposing the legal and moral fallacies of such a contention, by asserting the principles of legitimacy and public law, Talleyrand did more than win a point of procedure for his own advantage; he established and changed the principles upon which the deliberations of the Congress were thereafter conducted.⁴⁴

Talleyrand flavored all his negotiations at the Congress with an air of moral superiority. For the man who so oft has been considered amoral or immoral, this attitude of an appeal to morals worked in a surprisingly convincing fashion. One minister approached Talleyrand with a deal regarding Naples and Saxony, to which the latter replied: "You speak to me now of a bargain. . . . I cannot do so. I am so fortunate as not to be quite so much at my ease as yourself; it is your will and your interest that decide you, while as to me, *I am obliged to follow principles*, and principles do not allow compromise [emphasis added]."⁴⁵ The power of a moral principle - legitimacy - proved decisive in determining the fate of France and her new monarch.

⁴⁴Nicolson, 144.

⁴⁵Talleyrand, Memoirs, vol. 2, 207.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that the ambiguity of the times in which Talleyrand lived placed him in a situation which J.G.A. Pocock has termed a Machiavellian Moment. Talleyrand appears to be a man without allegiance as he repeatedly shifted his position. However, he found one principle which he consistently served throughout his public career - the good of France. That "good" consisted of peace and order in the face of threats to France from foreign invaders and anarchy at home. For Talleyrand, only a constitutional monarchy could serve his notion of the good of France. Talleyrand thus redefined and reinterpreted Machiavelli's principles from the need to preserve the republican form to the desirability of Constitutional Monarchy. Pocock's Machiavellian Moment certainly existed in revolutionary France, yet Talleyrand altered his reaction through a reinterpretation and application of Machiavelli's principles of successful political virtu.

Within the Machiavellian Moment, Pocock has argued that virtu is most evident in the confrontation with fortuna and corruption. Further, virtu is "that by which the good man imposed form on his fortuna."¹ By this definition, Talleyrand certainly exhibited the traits of a man of Machiavellian virtu, only the form which he chose to impose on the corruption of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras was that of

¹J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton: University Press, 1975), 157.

constitutional monarchy rather than that of a republic. Talleyrand believed such a form would provide for the good of France because only a monarchy balanced by a powerful nobility could provide for security from foreign invasion and peace from the anarchy of revolution at home. The anarchy which resulted from the failures of the Republic of Virtue showed him the instability of the republican form at home while the failures of Napoleon's aggressive foreign policy made clear the danger of despotism unchecked by a powerful noble class.

The principle of monarchy proved even more valuable to him in his later career than that of legitimacy. A constitutional monarchy in France was the one true principle which Talleyrand consistently chose to serve. The monarchical principle for France involved the salvation, for Talleyrand, of the order to which he had been born - the nobility - to prevent the dangers of despotism. Part of the successful exercise of virtue is the ability to impose definition and form on the politics of one's day. Talleyrand's ability to return to power and enforce his will throughout his career provide evidence that at least in this sense he was one of the most virtuous men of his day.

In the two cases studied in this thesis, Talleyrand's actions display his desire to serve the good of France by providing stability at home and security in foreign affairs. His attempts to salvage the monarchy in 1789-91 from financial ruin by proposing the confiscation of church lands exhibits his desire to provide for freedom from anarchy at home. Further, his role in the Bourbon Restoration and the Congress of Vienna did save France from the very real threat of intervention by hostile foreign powers. His virtue allowed him to successfully act in

the moment, eventually establishing in France a constitutional monarchy admitted to the circle of Great Powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15. Through the exercise of his virtu at the Congress, he served his notion of the good of France by securing peace, a Constitutional Monarchy, quiet from anarchy at home, and the unification of France.

Aside from his Machiavellian virtu shown in this thesis, Talleyrand also struggled all his life between the traditions of the Church and those of the Enlightenment in an effort to find a workable virtue for his own life. The judgment of posterity, a central concern of the philosophes, formed a primary consideration for Talleyrand as well. His recollection of the work accomplished in Vienna in 1814 and 1815 were heavily flavored with such concerns.

I await with confidence the judgment that posterity shall pass upon me. I shall simply call attention to the fact that, six weeks after the king's entrance into Paris, France's territory was secured, the foreign soldiers had quitted French soil, and . . . she possessed a superb army, and finally that we had preserved all the admirable works of art carried off by our armies from nearly all the museums of Europe.²

Yet the judgment of posterity was not his only worry.

The apostate priest who had been excommunicated in 1791 never abandoned entirely the Catholic Church. In his recollection of his role in the signing of the Concordat between Napoleon and Rome, he exudes pride. He also received a reward for his efforts: "after this reconciliation with the Church, to which I powerfully contributed, . . . Bonaparte obtained from the Pope a brief for my secularization."³

²Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, Prince de Benevet, Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, trans. Ms. Angus Hall, vol. 2 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 149. Subsequent references to the Memoirs will be noted as: Talleyrand, Memoirs, volume number, page number.

³Ibid., vol. 1, 214-5.

Thirty-six years later, as he lay on his deathbed, his relationship to the Church still troubled his mind.

One week before his death, on March 10, 1838, Talleyrand dictated a letter in which he sought forgiveness for those errors in his life which had brought the censure of the Church upon him.

I find myself obliged, after a long life and much experience, to blame the excesses of the time in which I have lived, and heartily to condemn the grave errors which . . . have so vexed and troubled the Catholic, Apostolic, and Romish Church. . . .

I have sought during my long political career for opportunities on which to render to religion . . . any services in my power. I have never ceased to consider myself as other than a child of the Church.⁴

Talleyrand also signed another letter to Pope Gregory XVI on the day of his death, March 17, 1838. He declares to the Pope that his Memoirs

will explain to posterity my conduct during the revolutionary epoch. I must content myself to-day . . . by simply drawing [the Holy Father's] attention to the general disorder of the time in which I lived. . . .

For the rest, I cannot now act more wisely, than by abandoning myself . . . to the justice and charity of the Church and her venerable Head.⁵

The ambiguity of serving two masters - the judgment of posterity and that of the Church - reveals itself in the final words which Talleyrand penned. While Talleyrand failed to repent explicitly, he blamed his era and the excesses of his day. Ultimately, he ended up praising his own efforts and the exercise of his virtue in such troubling times.

In concluding the first part of his Memoirs in 1816, Talleyrand believed he had permanently retired from public life. He claimed that in all his actions he had always been "animated by the most profound

⁴Ibid., vol. 5, 316B-316C.

⁵Ibid., 316C-316D.

love for France, [and] . . . always served her conscientiously, seeking for her that which I honestly believed would benefit her most."⁶ Then, in a rare passage that approaches a self-defence, he hopes that

Posterity, rather than contemporaries, will judge more liberally and more independently of those, who, placed like myself on the great stage of the world, during one of the most extraordinary epochs of history, have by this fact the right to be judged with greater impartiality and greater equity.⁷

The standards by which historians to date have chosen to judge him have not allowed such impartiality and equity. His own standards, and those of Machiavelli, allow a different judgment. In his service to France, in what he believed to be good for France, Talleyrand exhibited an unparalleled political virtue.

The trends of intellectual history over the past two decades or more have been to focus more on broad cultural factors. Micro-history and the impact of popular religion and popular culture have overshadowed the history of ideas and their influence on individuals. This thesis admittedly runs against that trend. The French Revolutionary period was a turning point in the birth of modernity: socially, politically, culturally and economically. Popular culture undoubtedly played a large part in the mass upheaval and dramatic changes of that time. Yet without an elite leadership, the insurrection of the masses would have been no more significant than previous rebellions on the continent of Europe. Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord provided a large part of that elite leadership. Unlike the vast majority of the early leaders in the Estates General and National Assembly, his influence lasted for

⁶Ibid., vol. 3, 205.

⁷Ibid.

decades. As Louis XVI, Mirabeau, Marat, Danton, Robespierre, Sieyes, Barras, Napoleon, Louis XVIII, Louis-Phillipe, and countless others crossed the stage of history and made their exits, Talleyrand remained behind the scenes exercising his influence over the affairs of France. His influence not only shaped the future of France but also that of Europe.

The Concert of Europe achieved by Talleyrand and the plenipotentiaries of the other powers at the Congress of Vienna secured a general peace which lasted nearly a century. Thus, perhaps with greater liberality, this thesis has examined the political philosophy and diplomatic virtu of this remarkable elite leader. This serious consideration of the defining virtu of such a man adds to our understanding of the politics, philosophy, and diplomatic virtu of Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord.

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VITA

Jack Jeffrey McEwen was born in Ft. Worth, Texas, on October 30, 1959. He attended Normal Park Elementary School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and graduated from the Baylor School in 1977. The following September he entered Vanderbilt University. He became a journeyman carpenter upon completion of the Carpenter's Apprenticeship Training Program of the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee in Chattanooga in 1982. He entered the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 1990 and in August 1992 received the Bachelor of Arts in History. That same month, he entered The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and in May 1995 received a Master of Arts degree in History.

He currently is an adjunct professor of history at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and began work on the Ph.D. in History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the fall of 1994.