

Mazzini's Thoughts on Machiavelli: Fortune, Divine Destiny, and The Clashing Natures

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The nineteenth-century Italian unification demonstrated the importance of nationalism and cultural formation in establishing a nation-state, while validating allegiances as a legitimate claim for politics by consolidating fragmented states into one nation. Described as “The Most Dangerous Man in Europe” by Austrian Prince Metternich, Giuseppe Mazzini was one of the utmost ideological representatives of the unification movement, often distinguished from others by his faith in Italy's divine destiny of national greatness.

Despite unsuccessful military revolutions, Mazzini's life's work was educating the Italian people on the importance of national fraternity. *Doveri dell'uomo*, written in 1860, is the primary exposition of Mazzini's doctrine, where he defends duties as a precondition to rights and his faith in the human capacity to bring forth a collective moral consciousness. In his dedicatory preface, *Agli operai italiani (To the Italian working class)*, he identifies two barriers that impede the construction of his ideal future for *la Patria* (the Fatherland): Machiavellianism and Historical Materialism. Identifying both as plagues that threaten to derail Italian progress, Mazzini writes:

“But you will not found this future for the Fatherland and for yourselves, unless you rid yourselves of two plagues which infect the well-to-do classes too much today, though I hope for a short while only, and threaten to lead Italian progress astray; Machiavellianism and Materialism. The first, a mean travesty of the doctrine of a Great but unhappy man, leads you away from love and from the frank, bold, and loyal adoration of truth; the second precipitates you, through the worship of self-interest, into egoism and anarchy”.

Mazzini's *Doveri dell'uomo* extensively develops his critique of Historical Materialism. However, he avoids expanding on his critique of Machiavelli: What about Machiavellianism is so fundamentally incompatible with Mazzini's ideal of *la Patria*, and why might he have chosen to leave this critique unwritten? This is the question that has motivated my research. At stake is not only the interpretation of Machiavelli within modern Italian nationalism but also the unveiling of a gap in Mazzini's political thought. An investigation into what specifically makes Machiavellianism an enemy to Mazzini's theory is an inquiry into whether this remains a danger Italians ought to fear today. Contrasting their frameworks raises questions about what people owe to the state and what rulers should seek to prioritize. Upon whom should the burden fall to ensure the continuity of the nation? Their competing visions presume different conditions of human nature, and their comparative analysis is a reflection on how the structures of government ought to better reflect the qualities of the governed.

My bibliography included Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and *I Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*, alongside Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Hankins' *Virtue Politics*, and Riall's *Risorgimento*. I concluded that accepting Machiavellianism rejects a fundamental premise of Mazzini's, as Machiavelli elevates fortune to the supreme arbiter, irreconcilable with Mazzini's faith in a divine purpose guiding humanity. Furthermore, an inquiry into Mazzini's understanding of human nature revealed that Mazzini would find in Machiavelli a fundamental betrayal of mankind. Main points of contention include a presumed fickleness and malice inherent in their nature. This is rather similar to his case against Marxism, raising the question of whether he avoided a fuller engagement with Machiavelli because his critique of both “plagues” collapses into the same deceit of nature or whether he considered Marxism the most pressing adversary.

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