

***A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini's Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations***, Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati, eds.  
(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 260 pp., \$30 cloth.

Giuseppe Mazzini is almost forgotten today, but in nineteenth-century Europe the Italian activist-philosopher was one of the most influential public voices. A passionate enemy of the old monarchies, he conceived of the nation as a means to achieve democracy and international peace. *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations*, a new collection of original texts by Mazzini, provides an opportunity to rediscover the thinker and his answers to a question still eminently important today: namely, what moral significance one should ascribe to the nation-state.

The introduction by the editors, Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati, provides helpful background information on Mazzini's writings. As they explain, following the Congress of Vienna in 1815, most of Italy was controlled by the Austrian Empire. Several movements for national unification and independence arose, and Mazzini joined their fight early in his life. This, and his membership in a Freemason group, soon caught the attention of the authorities. He was arrested and subsequently fled the country. In exile, he devoted more time to theoretical reflections and engaged in debates with such leading public figures as Charles Guizot, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx.

In 1849, Mazzini's hopes for political change almost became reality. A republican uprising toppled the pope, ended his rule over Rome, and gave the city a democratic constitution. Mazzini immediately returned and became one of the three leaders of

the new republican government. As elsewhere in Europe, however, this revolutionary experiment was short-lived. Responding to a request by the pope, French troops conquered the city only a few months later, and Mazzini again had to go into exile.

The first part of *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations* consists of texts in which Mazzini elaborates his understanding of the nation. He starts from the assumption that all humans are created equal by God, which entitles them to certain basic liberties. Going further than his liberal contemporaries, Mazzini argues that such equality also implies a moral obligation to associate with others and to work toward the common good. What is needed in addition to liberal rights, then, are political structures that bring people together. Here, Mazzini turns to the nation. He concedes that any "mob" can share the same territory, language, and tradition. Yet, when these shared experiences are met by a conscious decision to associate with others in the pursuit of the common good, they can serve as the nucleus of a nation. The nation is, thus, neither a natural given nor an end in itself, but a means to unite people on a larger scale and to align their actions toward the common good. As to the internal organization of the nation, it seems almost self-evident to Mazzini that for free men, democracy is "the only logical and truly legitimate form of Government" (p. 97).

However, Mazzini does not end here. For him, the nation is a means to overcome

the individual's isolation, but as such it is only another step toward the global community of mankind. Recchia and Urbinati draw parallels to Kant's concept of "perpetual peace," and indeed Mazzini seems to be motivated by similar hopes: the book's second part shows Mazzini as an advocate of cooperation among the various national movements all across Europe. He sees it as a matter of both moral obligation and prudence to counter the alliance of the old monarchies through a "Holy Alliance of the Peoples" (p. 121), and even suggests the creation of a "United States of Europe" (p. 135).

The final part of the book further expands these ideas and focuses on the ethical conduct of international affairs. Mazzini is aware of the realities of international politics, and yet he argues that such realities have to be overcome: "What purpose would a republic serve, if it had to feed itself on the very passions, anger, and selfishness that we are fighting?" (p. 157). Mazzini highlights two consequences of his approach. First, the principle of nonintervention should no longer serve as a disguise for passivity. Like Mill, he argues that a military intervention can be justified if its goal is to counter a preceding intervention into an internal conflict. If monarchies support each other in their fights against national movements, so can and should those who strive for national self-determination. Second, Mazzini eloquently criticizes the secrecy of diplomatic negotiations. Rather than leaving the conduct of international affairs to a few diplomats, he proposes to make it the subject of public debate. This would not only be more democratic; Mazzini, like Kant, is convinced that such public deliberation would result in a more peaceful outcome.

The title *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations* nicely summarizes the editors' interpretation of Mazzini. Recchia and Urbinati

depict him as a thinker who combines the liberal commitment to universal basic rights with a voluntaristic and instrumental understanding of the nation. But while this interpretation adequately reflects Mazzini's intentions, the editors could have been more explicit about the tensions inherent in his thinking. For instance, despite his lifelong experience of political conflict, Mazzini seems to assume that all human conflicts will be resolved through the creation of democratic nation-states. As a consequence, he downplays the risks associated with his proposals. Only in passing does he mention "national prejudices" and their potential to threaten international peace, or the danger of a Tocquevillian tyranny of the majority. Another, even more obvious, tension arises from Mazzini's passionate embrace of colonialism's "moral mission" (p. 238). While the editors rightly point out that many of his liberal contemporaries shared this positive perception of colonialism, it remains surprising how a thinker so dedicated to national self-determination could maintain such a view.

Recchia and Urbinati deserve much credit for making Mazzini available for rediscovery. In a few instances, however, one wishes the editors had gone into greater detail to provide some context for Mazzini's work. For example, while the texts seem well chosen to represent the spectrum of Mazzini's writings, it would have been useful had the editors given some explanation for their particular selections. In addition, while the introduction alludes to the political and academic reception of Mazzini's thinking in the twentieth century, a more systematic overview is missing. In the end, however, these minor criticisms do not make *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations* any less fascinating. Reading Mazzini is like traveling through time: whereas today

we find ourselves discussing the decline of the nation-state, for Mazzini it was hardly more than a utopian idea. And still, his early suggestion of a “liberal nationalism”—echoed today by, among others, David Miller and Yael Tamir—is an inspiring contribution to the current debates on

global justice, humanitarian intervention, and secession.

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