

The Mind of Macron



by Theodore Dalrymple

The inclination to analyze politicians' conduct by means of psychiatric diagnosis is growing. This is unsurprising in view of what was once called psychiatric imperialism: the classification of all thought and human behavior whatever as psychiatric disorder. Psychiatry becomes indistinguishable from gossip.

We all like gossip—except, perhaps, for people with psychiatric disorders. It is easier and more enjoyable to talk about the character of those who decide policies than about the policies themselves. What should economic policy be? Can one think of a more boring subject? But the personality or character of those who make it, always for the most discreditable of reasons, is endlessly interesting, an inexhaustible source of undisciplined speculation.

How we love to despise! I have sometimes thought that the most basic of human needs is that of having someone to look down

on. The one thing to be said in favor of modern politics is that it supplies more than enough grounds to go round for satisfying this need. When we say of our politicians that they are all the same, we do not mean it as a compliment. We mean that they are all scoundrels.

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Recently, I saw an article in a French publication analyzing President Macron’s decision to dissolve the National Assembly as a kind of psychiatric symptom. It was the product of his narcissistic personality disorder, a great favorite among the psychiatric diagnosticians of political leaders whom they have never met. President Macron consulted no one over his decision, precisely because of his sense of his own superior intelligence and self-sufficiency. Why consult others when, like Walt Whitman, you contain multitudes?

Narcissists are easily wounded, however, for their sense of their own superiority is fragile and needs constant refreshment. This explains why poor President Macron was so upset by the recent European elections, in which his party—which is a mere extension of himself—was roundly rejected by the electorate. Like a wounded buffalo on the plains of Serengeti, he bellowed and struck out where he could. And all hunters know that a wounded buffalo is the most dangerous of beasts.

Actually, his decision to dissolve the National Assembly was far from irrational from a certain point of view. There were three, possibly four, possible outcomes, all of them favorable to M. Macron himself, if not to the country that he shepherds if he does not lead.

The first is that the *Rassemblement National* (RN), lazily referred to always as the far right though its economic policies are of the left, would win an outright majority and form a government. It would have three years to prove itself

utterly incompetent, which it almost certainly would (it would probably require less than three years to do so), thus destroying its reputation once and for all as a possible alternative to the political class that has ruled France for so long. M. Macron would go down in French history as the beneficent angel of the RN's death.

The second possibility, though the least likely, was that the French population, when confronted by a choice between extremes, would take fright and vote for what they already knew, i.e., M. Macron. This would be in accordance with the great political maxim enunciated in Hilaire Belloc's poem "Jim, Who Ran Away From His Nurse, and Was Eaten by a Lion." Jim's nurse (nanny or governess) goes to his parents after Jim has been eaten by the lion in the zoo.

*When Nurse informed his Parents, they
Were more Concerned than I can say: –
His Mother, as She dried her eyes,
Said, "Well—it gives me no surprise,
He would not do as he was told!"
His Father, who was self-controlled,
Bade all the children round attend
To James's miserable end,
And always keep a-hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.*

Fear of finding something worse is what keeps a lot of politicians in power in representative democracies; and M. Macron, nanny to the nation, might hope that the French people realize in time that there are far worse people than he in the political menagerie.

Another possibility is that, in the absence of a majority in the National Assembly, and with no possibility of a coalition between any of the squabbling parties, M. Macron will have to rule by decree—which is what most politicians want to do

anyway, to rid themselves of all the irritating naysayers when they themselves, the politicians, *know* what is best for the nation, if not for the whole of humanity. There is no difference between opposition and obstruction; the problem with opponents is that they are completely unable to see the full beauty of the leader's intentions and the brilliance of the means by which he means to achieve them.

The fourth (however, faint) possibility is that a stinging defeat would provide the pretext for M. Macron's resignation before his term is up, thus (possibly) clearing him for the third mandate not foreseen by the French constitution. True, he is extremely unpopular at the moment (whether he knows it is debatable and debated), but in any case, in three years' time, when the next presidential elections are due, the country will have been so badly governed that everyone will look back on the Macron years as a golden age and vote for him again. Besides, there is always room in politics for even greater hatred than that which already exists. In a sense, no man can ever be the most hated possible. In three years' time, his opponents may be more hated than he.

Thus, we see that M. Macron's decision, which everyone called impulsive, the reaction of a spoilt child deprived of its toys, was quite possibly calculated. It might have created a political crisis, but as the Chinese know, a crisis is also an opportunity. The only question is, for whom?

There is increasingly a very deep problem in Western politics, that of legitimacy. Where once the legal legitimacy of rulers coincided to a large degree with their moral legitimacy, there was no problem; both sides of a political debate (assuming there to be only two) were legitimate legally and morally. But now the two types of legitimacy have parted company, which is a recipe for perpetual conflict, irresolution, and possible civil war. In a world full of dangers, this is one danger more.

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