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## Review Maccoby, M., Fuchsman, K. (Eds.) The >madness< of King Donald Trump

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When Donald Trump recently walked the short distance from the White House, through Lafayette Square, to pose holding up a bible outside St John's Episcopal Church in Washington DC, a half-forgotten phrase from US politics may have cropped up in some people's minds:

“In your guts you know he's nuts.”

This was the slogan hurled at the Republican Party's Presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater, during his unsuccessful 1964 campaign against the incumbent, Lyndon Johnson. Troubled by the speculation that some psychiatrists had allowed themselves to be drawn into, the American Psychiatric Association subsequently issued a statement, popularly known as the “Goldwater Rule”, to assert that no professional view or diagnosis should be offered of anyone who had not been examined as a patient. <https://time.com/4875093/donald-trump-goldwater-rule-history/>

This revealing new book does not breach the Goldwater Rule. But, in a collection of thoughtful and well-argued essays, much light is shone on the perplexing, troubling personality of the current, 45th US President, who faces his own date with destiny (and voters) this November. The editors, Michael Maccoby and Ken Fuchsman, have pulled together work by psychoanalysts, political scientists and historians to considerable effect. If you want to understand why Donald J Trump acts and talks the way he does this book is the place to start.

And to be clear — no diagnosis of mental illness is offered here. On the contrary, Maccoby writes:

“A cottage industry has emerged of mental health experts and commentators diagnosing Donald Trump as suffering from a narcissistic personality disorder. But Trump's personality doesn't fit into a narrow diagnostic category of a narcissistic personality disorder. He is not suffering from a delusion that he is president. He is not disabled. His personality is a variation of a normal narcissistic personality type.”

The narcissistic personality is, as Maccoby explains, one of three normal personality types proposed by Sigmund Freud (the erotic, obsessive and narcissistic types). Erich Fromm (with whom Maccoby worked) added a fourth type, the marketing personality. Trump's narcissism, Maccoby argues, is combined with a marketing orientation: he is a “marketing narcissist”.

“His marketing orientation makes him vulnerable because he needs constant approval,”



Maccoby writes. “His grandiose bluff and bluster are parts of a fragile narcissistic self-image defence that must be protected. He dismisses messages and attacks messengers who disparage his self-worth. He seeks constant adulation.”

This is familiar from his press conferences and public appearances. Critical questions are “nasty”, but people who are “nice” to him are praised.

In fact we have reason to believe Trump approves of at least some of Maccoby’s analysis. In Trump’s book *Think Like a Billionaire* (2004) he refers to Maccoby’s own earlier book, *The Productive Narcissist* (2003).

“Michael Maccoby, a psychoanalyst and consultant, believes that billionaires like Jeff Bezos, Steve Jobs, and Ted Turner are successful in part because they are narcissists who devote their talent with unrelenting focus to achieving their dreams, even if it’s sometimes at the expense of those around them,” Trump (or “Trump”) writes. “Maccoby’s book *The Productive Narcissist* makes a convincing argument that narcissism can be a useful quality if you’re trying to start a business. A narcissist does not hear the naysayers. At the Trump Organisation, I listen to people, but my vision is my vision.”

Certainly, little about Trump surprises Maccoby. As he explains:

“I have coached over 30 narcissistic CEOs and executives. Almost all played fast and loose with the truth. One narcissistic CEO in analysis told me that he sometimes lied about his company’s products or results, but then he worked hard to make his claims real.”

But Trump the marketer has an extremely narrow and impoverished view of his fellow human beings. As Maccoby writes:

“Trump’s marketing orientation treats himself and others as commodities. He values powerful and successful people and treats the weak and vulnerable with contempt as worthless, unless of course they can be useful to him, like those who are part of his base whom he seduces with promises and flattery.”

**“A sad and vulnerable boy who is terrified of being called a loser...”**

How and why did Trump get to be like this? There is not space here for a full life history. But according to the psychoanalyst Dr Paul Elovitz, Trump’s early life was disrupted when he was two years old. His mother became ill after the birth of her fifth child, which led to her not being (emotionally) available to him. “Trump craves constant adoration but will settle for any attention whatsoever, which is the primary root of his disruptive tweets,” Elovitz says. He wants attention and yet “defiantly acts as if he doesn’t need the world”.

“As a young child, feeling physically and emotionally abandoned by his mother, he responded to this hurt by denying his own vulnerability,” Elovitz says. “Trump thinks that he is the same person now that he was at age five and I am inclined to agree with him.”

He sees the world as hostile, unpleasant and unpredictable. “It’s war every day”, Trump is supposed to have said. According to Elovitz: “Buried deep below Trump’s almost lifelong grandiosity I suspect there is a sad and vulnerable boy who is terrified of being called a loser... He is unable to make close friends because he is in need of the instant gratification of feeling superior



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to others. Trump is too competitive to allow anyone to be truly close to him emotionally.”

**“It’s rational for a demagogue to seem irrational”**

Instead, Trump seems to revel in his lonely, demagogic stance. In his essay Michael Signer, a politics lecturer but also a former mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia (at the time of the “Unite the Right” rally in August 2017), says that a demagogue usually passes four tests:

“First, he identifies as a man of the masses, usually by attacking elites. Second, he creates great waves of passion. Third, he uses that passion for political benefit. Fourth, he tests or breaks established rules of governance. Taken together, this approach enables the demagogue to create a state within a state — a massive cult — that follows him alone.”

Demagogues, Signer writes, “relish their status as political bad boys, vulgarians who say things they really shouldn’t...what so many critics of demagogues have trouble getting their minds around is also the most necessary to understanding them: it’s rational for a demagogue to seem irrational.”

Demagogues also seem to require a constant feeding of the ego. As Ken Fuchsman, President of the International Psychohistorical Association and co-editor of the book, points out in his essay:

“A former top adviser told New York Times reporters that after two or three days, Trump ‘could not handle watching the news without seeing himself on it’. The journalists concluded that the President is on a ‘perpetual quest’ to have himself be on television.”

**“His narcissism is a resource for...his electoral and political success.”**

In her essay Elizabeth Lunbeck, professor of the history of science at Harvard University, asks some pertinent questions. “How it is that a staggering 63 million American citizens voted for this man with no political experience, a man roundly judged to be unfit to hold office, who broke just about every political norm? And why have a goodly proportion of his supporters stuck with him, driven...by what is by all accounts an utterly implacable, unperturbable belief in him and what he represents?”

Prof Lunbeck answers her own questions. “Trump mobilises his narcissism...to connect to his followers, thereby eliciting their willing submission and unwavering loyalty...What does he promise in return? Participation in his greatness. The deal thus struck, many of the nation’s most disenfranchised and aggrieved have sworn allegiance to this larger-than-life figure who, they feel, understands them and their struggles.”

Trump was in a sense preparing for this role for many years. “I play to people’s fantasies,” “Trump” writes in his best-selling *The Art of the Deal* (Trump & Schwartz, 1987). “People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It’s an innocent form of exaggeration — and a very effective form of promotion.”

Lunbeck adds: “The difficulty in explaining Trump and his appeal lies in the fact that he has prevailed not despite but because of all of his lies, anger, contempt toward losers, intolerance of dissent, and bombastic grandiosity. His flouting of just about every political, social, and sex-



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ual norm has only enhanced his appeal to his devotees. In short: his narcissism is a resource for — not an impediment to — his electoral and political success.”

Maccoby agrees that Trump has created a grandiose self-image to protect his vulnerability, and attacks anyone who threatens it. He apparently told his former aide Anthony Scaramucci, “I’m a total act”. Trump is “over-competitive and distrustful to the point of paranoia,” Maccoby says. This paranoia creates enemies and makes friendship impossible. “His ethical commandment is: do not get caught.”

### **What is he in it for?**

To ask the great question the management writer Jim Collins puts to all leaders (and aspiring leaders): what is Trump in it for? He seems to see life as an unpleasant battle, and his only purpose, Maccoby says, is to be admired as a winner.

He has fed on people’s anxiety, and the fact that in times of great uncertainty and change people fall for narcissistic leaders who give them hope. But, as Maccoby says, “Rather than alleviating anxiety, as FDR did when he said, ‘The only thing we have to fear is fear itself’, Trump has increased our anxiety by feeding the flames of political conflict.”

And yet, what led to his ascendancy and the enduring Trump phenomenon, Maccoby and Tuchsman argue in their introduction, is as much about many of us as it is about him.

There is a better way. “We need leaders who will address the causes of our anxiety and work to resolve them”, Maccoby concludes. “Anxiety will not be cured by the false promises of narcissistic, populist leaders or by mechanisms of escape, but only by addressing the causes of anxiety on global, national, organisational, and individual levels.”

Not long now til November. Every vote, we must hope, will count.