H-Diplo | ISSF

POLICY Roundtable 2-2 (2017): Emmanuel Macron's Political Revolution in France

Published on **17 November 2017** | issforum.org

H-Diplo/ISSF Editors: **Aline-Florence Manent, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins**, and **Diane Labrosse**
H-Diplo/ISSF Web and Production Editor: **George Fujii**

Shortlink: http://tiny.cc/PR-2-2
Permalink: http://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/2-2-macron
PDF URL: http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/Policy-Roundtable-2-2.pdf

Contents

Introduction by Aline-Florence Manent, Queen Mary University of London, and Michael C. Behrent, Appalachian State University 2
Essay by Michael C. Behrent, Appalachian State University 5
Essay by Emile Chabal, University of Edinburgh 9
Essay by Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, City College of New York and Sciences Po, Paris 13
Essay by Aline-Florence Manent, Queen Mary University of London 16
Response by Michael C. Behrent, Appalachian State University 20
Response by Emile Chabal, University of Edinburgh 22
Response by Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, City College of New York and Sciences Po 23
Response by Aline-Florence Manent, Queen Mary University of London 24

© Copyright 2017 The Authors |

Introduction by Aline-Florence Manent, Queen Mary University of London, and Michael C. Behrent, Appalachian State University

Everything new is on the rim of our view, in the darkness, below the horizon, so that nothing new is visible but in the light of what we know.[1]

When Emmanuel Macron beat Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election on 7 May 2017, many in Europe and North America breathed a collective sigh of relief. Macron's victory seemed to confirm an incipient anti-populist trend that had been set earlier that year in the Netherlands and Austria. In the aftermath of the Brexit-vote and Donald Trump's unexpected victory in the United States, Macron seemed to have stopped the populist bonfire in its tracks, turning France—rather surprisingly—into a paragon of democratic wisdom, political moderation, and optimism.

Macron's achievement was all the more stunning in light of his rapid ascendency and his complete upending of the French political landscape. At 39, Macron became the youngest president in French history. He was completely unknown to the public until François Hollande, his predecessor, named him a member of his staff in 2012, before appointing him Economics Minister in 2014. Though Hollande, his mentor, was a socialist, Macron argued that the time had come to transcend the antiquated center-left versus center-right alternative that had structured French politics since the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958. In the fall of 2016, Macron resigned from the government to campaign for the presidency, a quest that, to most, seemed all the more improbable as he pursued it independently of the traditional party structure, founding an entirely new movement, *En Marche*, as a vehicle for his centrist outlook.

Racked by internal divisions and weakened by the negative perception of Hollande's presidency, the Socialist Party imploded and its uncharismatic presidential candidate, Benoît Hamon, led the party to its worst electoral performance in decades. As a new radical pole surfaced on the left under its self-avowed populist leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the traditional Gaullist party, *Les Républicains*, lost credibility by clinging to its scandal-ridden candidate François Fillon.

This context created a fortuitous opening for Macron's victory. Whether or not French voters positively endorsed his politics or only reluctantly cast their ballots for Macron, they clearly rejected the anti-European, xenophobic brand of populism embodied by Marine Le Pen's National Front. On 7th May 2017, Macron became president and his party—which had not existed a few months earlier—went onto win, in legislative elections held in June, an absolute majority in the National Assembly. No presidential election since the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958 has transformed French politics so radically, in so little time.

A victory that seems so unprecedented raises many questions. How exactly should one understand Macron's political identity and the type of politics he embodies? Is the new dynamic that he claims to represent as innovative as it purports to be? If Macronism is only old wine in new bottles, will this hamper Macron's

[1] Zia Haider Rahman, *In the Light of What We Know* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014), 290.

ability to lead France and Europe through the subtle revolution he laid out in his book.[2] These are some of the key issues addressed in this forum.

Considering Macron's victory from the wider perspective of the European political situation, Carlo Invernizzi Accetti claims that while Macron's aversion to politics-as-usual and his pragmatic instincts might appear to represent a much-needed rejuvenation of an outdated political system, his charismatic style, dismissal of ideology, and emphasis on executive power are in fact characteristic of many long-term and troubling trends in European politics, notably the hollowing out of democracy as a deliberative process. Macron, consequently, is perhaps best seen as a symptom of Europe's predicament than its long-awaited cure.

Michael Behrent asserts that Macron is simply a particularly undiluted symbol of the free-market, neoliberal politics that have substantially transformed European and global society in recent decades: Macron's originality lies not in the policies he supports, but in the way he managed to create a broad and coherent electoral coalition to support his program.

In his contribution, Emile Chabal links Macron to the liberal tradition, but maintains that this association has less to do with his beliefs than with the electorate he needed to court in order to win: a growing constituency frustrated with excessive bureaucracy, inefficient governance, and desperate for political and economic reform. Though, from an international perspective, these ideas may seem unremarkable, they have rarely gained significant political momentum in France: in this sense, Chabal argues, Macron deserves to be seen as an original phenomenon.

Aline-Florence Manent argues that Macron bears an intellectual kinship to other liberal social democrats who defied the standard left versus right political divide. Like Raymond Aron, Manent contends, France's new President was exasperated by the sterile antagonisms between center-left and center-right politicians – antagonisms owing more to partisan clansmanship and factitious ideological divides than to fundamentally divergent political convictions. Rejecting all forms of dogmatisms, Macron conspicuously fits the portrait that Aron once sketched of himself: "a man without a party, whose opinions offend first one side and then the other, who is all the more unbearable because he takes his moderation to excess and hides his passions under his arguments."

While the contributions focus on understanding the nature of Macron's victory in May 2017, it is hoped that they will also provide some context for and insight into the unfolding political situation in France, as Macron struggles to deliver his political revolution in France.

Participants:

Aline-Florence Manent is a Lecturer in the History of Political Thought at Queen Mary University of London. Her first book, *Rethinking Democracy in Postwar Germany*, is forthcoming with Harvard University Press.

[2] Emmanuel Macron, *Révolution* (Paris: Pocket, 2017),

Michael C. Behrent is an associate professor in the History Department at Appalachian State University (Boone, North Carolina, USA). His work has appeared in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Modern Intellectual History*, the *Journal of Modern History*, and the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*.

Emile Chabal is a Chancellor's Fellow in History at the University of Edinburgh. He has written widely on contemporary French political culture and the legacies of empire in France, including *A Divided Republic: nation, state and citizenship in contemporary France* (Cambridge, 2015) and *France since the 1970s: history, politics and memory in an age of uncertainty* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). He is currently working on intellectual life in post-war Europe and the history of transnational Marxist thought.

Carlo Invernizzi Accetti is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the City College of New York and Research Associate at the Center for European Studies of the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris* (Sciences Po).

Essay by Michael C. Behrent, Appalachian State University

Macron: A Class Act

In his relatively brief public career, French President Emmanuel Macron has distinguished himself for his remarks about poor people. In May 2016, while still Economics Minister, Macron was drawn into an acrimonious exchange with two protestors. They belonged to a movement opposing a law proposed by France's nominally socialist government that, they maintained, would significantly limit the economic protections afforded French workers. At one point in the discussion, the young Minister asserted: "Your T-shirt doesn't scare me. The best way to buy yourself a suit is to work." One of the men replied: "But I dream of working, Monsieur Macron."[1] Two years earlier, in an interview he gave shortly after joining the cabinet, Macron referred to a slaughterhouse in Brittany that was being forced out of business as a "company [with] a majority of women, many of whom are illiterate…" He subsequently apologized for remarks widely seen as callous and patronizing.[2] Last July, Macron—now France's president—inaugurated a "startup campus" in a building that formerly belonged to the national railroad company, using a somewhat strained analogy: he admonished the audience of entrepreneurs never to be complacent and to remember that "a train station is a space where one crosses paths with people who succeed and people who are nothing."[3]

Critics on the left as well as the right have denounced these remarks as evidence of Macron's *mépris de classe*—that is, his 'class contempt.' Whatever one's moral assessment of these statements, they are indicative of the broader social and political currents that contributed to his stunning victory in May 2017—specifically, the formation of an electoral bloc comprising France's wealthiest groups that transcends the left-right divide, while excluding working-class populations. Below, I examine this claim by breaking it down into four theses.

1. Macron won the presidency by finding the winning formula for achieving a goal that has eluded French leaders for decades: an electoral coalition supportive of neoliberal reforms.

Though historians are trained not to think teleologically, it is difficult not to see Macron as succeeding where his predecessors on both the left and the right had failed: in establishing a workable political consensus around free-market policies, the deregulation of the labor market, the minimization of the state, and a pro-European Union orientation. Macron's program—which for much of the campaign was outlined in only the vaguest of terms—was little more than a smorgasbord of late twentieth-century and early twentieth-first century political

[1] BFMTV, « Emmanuel Macron chahuté à Lunel: ce qu'il s'est passé » (YouTube video), 28 May 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtRvOs5vaC8.

[2] Laurence Girard et Philippe Euzen, « Macron s'excuse pour ses propos sur les 'illettrées de Gad,'» *Le Monde,* 17 September 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/09/17/macron-s-excuse-pour-ses-propos-sur-les-illettrees-de-gad_4489071_823448.html.

[3] Le Scan Politique, "Emmanuel Macron évoque les 'gens qui ne sont rien' et suscite les critiques," *Le Figaro,* 2 July 2017, http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/2017/07/02/25001-20170702ARTFIG00098-emmanuel-macron-evoque-les-gens-qui-ne-sont-rien-et-suscite-les-critiques.php .

commonplaces: tax cuts, budget cuts, privatization, and 'workfare.' The ideas of France's youngest president are surprisingly old-fashioned.

As Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini argue in a recent essay, "modernizers" in the Socialist Party favoring market-oriented policies have, since 1983, been constrained by their party's dependence on the electoral support of workers and civil servants anxious about the consequences of economic liberalization and European integration, while their counterparts on the center right have had to juggle their own electorate's contradictory interests, which range from enthusiasm for certain forms of liberalization (notably cutting back on civil servants) to a desire to defend the "French model" of job security and social welfare.[4]

The 2017 campaign was shaped by an extraordinary crisis in France's political establishment, in which the disastrous presidency of François Hollande (whose business-friendly policies alienated much of his socialist base while incurring the right's contempt) dovetailed with the collapse of the center-right contender's candidacy (which, under normal circumstances, should have been a shoo-in). Macron capitalized on this crisis by uniting the "modernizing"—i.e., neoliberal—wings of the right and left into a hastily assembled yet formidable political movement. The sociological confirmation of this feat can be seen in Macron's overwhelming support among managerial classes (*"cadres"* supported him over Le Pen by 82%) and the wealthy (he was favored by 75% of voters in households earning more than 3,000 euros a month, compared to only 55% of in household making 1,250 euros per month). Macron's achievement consists not in a new set of ideas, but in a political coalition that (at least temporarily) obliterated France's existing political structure (notably the left-right axis) by establishing a unitary neoliberal movement favored by France's more affluent citizens.

2. The rationale of Macron's new electoral logic corresponds largely to support for the European Union in its current form.

The coalition that Macron assembled has been most clearly foreshadowed by moments in recent decades when the French were asked to weigh in on European issues. Amable and Palombarini argue that François Mitterrand saw the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty as an opportunity to strengthen the "modernizing" line within the Socialist Party that had been ascendant since the turn to austerity in 1983, while committing France, through greater European integration, to liberal policies rejected by the socialists' allies on the left (notably the communists). They write: "Mitterrand's strategy brought to light, during the debate on the Maastricht referendum, a political cleavage that superimposed itself on the traditional left-right confrontation: against the proponents of European integration, and the neoliberal policies it implied, stood opposed the defenders of national sovereignty. This new cleavage blew up the left."[5]

Similar dynamics shaped the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. The issue split the socialists as well as the center-right (even if these parties' leaders generally favored the treaty), while pro-sovereignty movements on the right and left opposed it. The class character of the divide was particularly

[4] Amable and Palombarini, *L'illusion du blog bourgeois: alliances sociales et avenir du modèle français*, (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 2017).

[5] Amable and Palombarini, 83.

striking: for instance, 76% of workers voted against the treaty.[6] Though Maastricht passed (51% to 49%) and the constitutional treaty failed (54.7% to 45.3%), the basic electoral dynamics in evidence in Macron's 2017 victory were present in both referenda: on the one hand, a coalition of relatively wealthy votes favorable to the European project straddling the left-right divide; on the other, a more working-class electorate fearing the economic consequences of continued European integration.

3. Macron's new electoral alliance is characterized by a distinctive ideology and rhetoric.

Macron has given credence to the idea that his program of market-friendly reforms has tapped into a deep-seated desire for political change and policies that are 'neither right nor left.' In fact, it represents little more than the convergence of the center right with the sector of the French left that supports center-right economic policies. Macron has, moreover, successfully tied his free-market policies to a (moderately) liberal social values and a rhetoric of "openness" and "hope." Yet as Christophe Guilluy argues, the primary effect of the latter has been to stigmatize groups facing the most economically precarious situations as close-minded, fearful, intolerant, and, in many instances, as racist. *Bien pensant* urbanites, Guilluy contends, equate "peripheral France" with a "white, xenophobic France, opposed to the ethnicized neighborhoods of the *banlieue,*" even if this "*antiracisme de salon*" is more about "defending class interests, those of the bourgeoisie," rather than protecting immigrants from fascism.[7]

4. Working-class voters largely oppose Macron, yet lack an effective political vehicle.

Twenty-five years ago, an American politician made a speech that uncannily prefigures Macron's 2017 campaign. "We can't all be born rich, handsome, and lucky," Zel Miller remarked in 1992. "And that's why we have a Democratic Party."[8] Though the Democrats were obviously never a socialist party, the New Deal coalition that defined them through the 1970s was, as Thomas Frank maintains in a recent book, notable for "its heavy reliance upon organized labor and its tendency to see issues through the lens of social class."[9] Frank's claim that the Democrats, beginning in the 1970s, jettisoned their support of labor and the working class in favor of support for professionals embracing meritocracy and liberal social values applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the story of France's socialists over roughly the same period. The notorious 2011 report by the socialist-affiliated think tank Terra Nova, which acknowledged that the left had all but lost the working-class to the right and that socialists needed to build an electoral majority based on "values" rather than economic interests, is a fitting example of how the French left, like its American counterpart, gave up on being "the

[6] Amable and Palombarini, 87.

[7] Christophe Guilluy, *La Crépuscule de la France d'en haut*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2016), 176, 177.

[8] Zel Miller's address to the 1992 Democratic convention is available here: https://www.c-span.org/video/?27051-1/governor-zell-miller-1992-democratic-national-convention-keynote-address.

[9] Thomas Frank, *Listen, Liberal: Or, Whatever Happened to the Party of the People?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016), 44.

party of the people."[10] The abandonment of the working class that culminated with Hollande made Macron's coalition—and the Socialist Party's demise—possible.

Macron's unification of the wealthier classes into a unitary political movement means that the French working class lacks a party that can dependably represent it. Unquestionably, the National Front's populist orientation under Marine Le Pen has given it the strongest claim to being the party of the working-class. As Pascal Perrineau notes, Marine Le Pen, in round one of the 2017 election, came in first among workers (winning 39%) and employees (30%)—scores comparable to those won by Mitterrand in 1988 (42% and 38%, respectively).[11] Yet despite the rise of what Perrineau calls *gaucho-lepénisime*, the National Front is, as Amable and Palombarini explain, an unreliable champion, given that some of its support comes from social groups that still endorse the free-market orientation the party championed at least through the 1990s. Consequently, for many working-class voters, the only viable solution remains abstention. Macron's crushing defeat of Le Pen was marred by the lowest level of voter turnout for a second round since 1969. According to *Le Monde*, the demographics of abstention significantly overlapped with those of the Front's electorate.[12]

There is, in short, an underlying social and political logical to Macron's remarks about "people who are nothing." The question is whether France's new president will, as he pursues his agenda, galvanize this population, inciting it to become a genuine political force—or whether his actions will, concretely, relegate them to the same inaudible margins of French society to which—if his words are any indication—his mindset has already confined them.

[10] Olivier Ferrand, Romain Prudent, and Bruno Jeanbart, "Gauche: quelle majorité électorale pour 2012?," http://tnova.fr/rapports/gauche-quelle-majorite-electorale-pour-2012.

[11] Pascal Perrineau, *Cette France de gauche qui vote FN* (Paris: Seuil, 2017), 62.

[12] Jérémie Baruch, "Présidentielle 2017: où l'abstention a-t-elle été la plus élevée au second tour?," *Le Monde*, 8 May 2017.

Essay by Emile Chabal, University of Edinburgh

Emmanuel Macron: the Meaning of the Man

There is a strong temptation after any election, especially those of the presidential variety, to focus obsessively on the person who won. This is especially true when the winner is so unexpected. A year before their victories, most people in the United States and France would have found it difficult to believe that Donald Trump or Emmanuel Macron could win their respective elections. At that point, neither one of these otherwise dissimilar characters a long track record in politics, nor did they have the backing of a strong party machine. They seemed to be charismatic curiosities of the kind that have long given colour to electoral campaigns.

Inevitably, then, their victories provoked a good deal of after-the-fact analysis. Suddenly, the glaring spotlight was on politicians whose opinions had not been scrutinised with as much care as those of the front-runners. Journalists, documentary filmmakers, and academics rushed to pen their hot-takes and inside stories, all of which purported to reveal the 'truth' behind their protagonists' success.[1]

But, while there is value in looking at individual trajectories, this can only get us so far. To understand the meaning of presidents, we need to look at the histories and sociologies that surround them. In the case of Macron, there are three different elements that underpin his story: the chequered history of French political liberalism; the historic defeat of consensus politics; and the social fractures of French society. All of these played a role in his rapid rise to power.

The first of these is the most controversial, in large part because of the weakness of the French liberal tradition and the difficulty of defining liberalism in general. Much academic ink has been spilled in the past few months as intellectual historians have dissected Macron's intellectual heritage in an attempt to show that he is (or is not) a liberal. The results have been inconclusive. Macron has talked about the influence of people like the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, the editor and author Olivier Mongin and the economist Jean Pisani-Ferry, but it is hard to know what to do with this until we have a better idea of whether his policies in any way reflect this intellectual hinterland. Moreover, his new-found enthusiasm for the Gaullist grand gesture, and his reticence to describe himself as a 'liberal,' suggest that, whatever others might say, he is hardly any more liberal than his decidedly illiberal predecessors

The problem, it seems to me, is that most people approach the question of Macron's relationship to French liberalism the wrong way around. If Macron is a liberal, it is not because he sincerely subscribes to the tenets of liberalism, but because this is how his core electorate see him. Since at least the 1970s, sympathy for a particular form of French liberalism—one that is in favour of state reform, sceptical about the grand narrative of French republicanism, and open to outside influences—has been growing. And it is this wave that eventually carried Macron to power.

[1] In the case of Macron, see for instance Nicolas Prissette, *Emmanuel Macron en marche vers l'Élysée* (Paris: Plon, 2016), François-Xavier Bourmaud, *Macron: L'invité surprise* (Paris: L'Archipel, 2017); Anne Fulda, *Emmanuel Macron, un jeune homme si parfait* (Paris: Plon, 2017); and *Emmanuel Macron: Behind the Rise* (dir. Yann L'Hénoret, 2017).

Of course, Macron is not alone: there have been many other liberal politicians under the Fifth Republic. On the right, former Presidents Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Nicolas Sarkozy, as well as the former Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, have embodied different strands of this liberal current. And, on the left, a whole tradition of "second left" politicians, from former Prime Minister Michel Rocard to disgraced economist Dominique Strauss-Kahn have occupied a liberal space within the Parti socialiste (PS). But not since Giscard d'Estaing's surprise victory in the 1974 presidential election has the language of liberalism gained substantial electoral traction.

That it should have done so in 2017 makes perfect sense. The unprecedented failure of the main centre-left and centre-right parties created a wide space at the centre of the political spectrum. At the same time, Macron was able to draw on an acute language of decline and crisis, which has become central to contemporary French political liberalism since the early 2000s. A whole generation of young people in France have grown up thinking that their country is mired in sclerotic bureaucracy, inefficiently governed, and culturally on the wane. But rather than seek to defend a French statist 'model' or the value of the French language, many of these young people have preferred a language of liberal reform that promises to release them from the stranglehold of the state and open France's horizons to the outside world.

This electorate is often dismissed, especially on the left, as nothing more than an overprivileged upper-middle class in thrall to a fading neo-liberal ideology. To these critics, enthusiastic young Macron fans look suspiciously like those who frequented the British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's rallies in the 1990s. The implication is that France in 2017 has succumbed to a rehashed—and now discredited—New Labour-lite.

Quite apart from the problematic aspects of this argument—why do so many people persist in casting the French as somehow 'behind' the times?—the difference is that, in France, liberalism is still a political novelty. Former presidents like Jacques Chirac and François Hollande enacted economic and social policies that were not so different from their British and German counterparts, but they studiously avoided drawing attention to the neo-liberal assumptions behind what they were doing.

This is why Macron is such a breath of fresh air for young French liberals. He has acknowledged the need for reform and he intends to carry it out. He is not beholden to old ideologies and party structures, and his outward-looking persona promises symbolic change. The host of new faces who lined up to represent his party, *La République en marche* (LREM), are a powerful indication of the enthusiasm his campaign generated

Whether this will be enough to pacify the wider electorate is another question altogether. Already, the approval ratings are tumbling. For those who voted for Macron out of duty, the reality of his economic programme is slowly becoming clear; and, for those who voted for him out of conviction, the ease with which he has settled into the 'regal' posture of president is disconcerting. It seems increasingly likely that Macron is going to face the problem that has plagued all French liberals who have held positions of elected authority: elitism. And this, with a predatory far-right looking to feed off the scraps, could have damaging consequences.

But it is not only the far-right that Macron has to worry about. He also needs to watch out for the return of bipartisan politics. One of the major themes of the 2017 election cycle was the catastrophic collapse of the centre-right and centre-left brands of consensus politics. This was the exceptional context that made victory possible. Even Giscard d'Estaing in 1974 did not have such propitious circumstances: he had to fight off François Mitterrand, the representative of a quasi-united left front and one of the most experienced politicians

of the time. By contrast, Macron only had to see off the chastened figure of the *Front national*'s (FN) Marine Le Pen whose ill-fated performance in the final debate left her licking her wounds.

The question is: how long can this situation persist? It may be the end of the road for the PS, but the French left as a whole will almost certainly regroup around a new, more obviously left-wing entity, which may or may not include the maverick Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, *La France insoumise* (FI). As for the right, this was their election to win. Instead, their candidate, François Fillon, blew his chances in a banal corruption scandal and *Les Républicains* (LR) emerged divided from the legislative elections. Nevertheless, we can expect an aggressive campaign from the right in the coming years at all levels of French politics—they have revenge in their sight.

For many years, commentators have predicted the demise of the two-party system of the French Fifth Republic, especially under pressure from the FN, but this has not happened. The two-round electoral system forces voters to make a binary choice and pushes towards consensus politics. Macron, like Giscard d'Estaing before him, broke the system, but holding his presidency and party together is likely to be an insurmountable challenge. His achievement is real and his victory was remarkable, but for him to survive he will have to modify the institutions of the Fifth Republic, perhaps by introducing an element of proportional representation. His promises notwithstanding, it is still unclear whether he has the courage or the political capital to make such profound changes.

The final point worth highlighting is the effect that France's social fractures had on this election cycle. These were eloquently—if ambiguously—expressed in the very high rates of abstention in the second round of the presidential election and in the subsequent legislative elections. Abstention is notoriously difficult to interpret. Those on the left saw it as a protest against the binary opposition of "liberal Macron" and "fascist Le Pen" – and, to some extent, it was. But it was also due to an increasing dissatisfaction with France's political institutions, the perceived homogeneity of the governing classes, and simple electoral fatigue.

It is worth bearing in mind that, by European standards, electoral participation in France is high. 70-80% of registered voters routinely turn out to vote in municipal and presidential elections, the two most popular elections in France. But the high rate of abstention in the 2017 electoral cycle has nevertheless damaged Macron and his party's credibility. There is a lingering feeling, as there was in 2002 with Chirac, that Macron won by default. This sense that he was not properly "tested" is likely to lead to the rapid resurgence of other parties, as voters turn to them to balance out Macron's power.

It will also reinforce the corrosive sense of "exclusion" from the political system that many poorer French people feel. This will not necessarily benefit the FN, who have yet to resolve their post-election internal squabbles and the harsh reality of electoral failure. But it will leave Macron vulnerable to legitimate accusations that he is governing with and for the elite, especially in the light of the global attack on neo-liberal capitalism that has been building since the financial crisis of 2008.

Historians of France will be familiar with this tension between a governing elite and a restless population. For all of the country's proud tradition of protest, the French themselves have often been governed by a coterie of technocratic civil servants, headed by a semi-authoritarian president. Times have changed, however. In 2007, the French elected a media-hungry and hyperactive president whose sheer omnipresence eclipsed all previous incumbents. And in 2012, they voted for a modest, uncharismatic figure who failed to "incarnate" the presidency.

Maybe, then, the success of a handsome young technocrat in 2017 is a (youthful) return to the norm? Possibly. But I do wonder if he can turn back the clock. When the French voted for Macron, they voted for change; they did not vote for more of the same. It is still unclear whether Macron has what it takes to execute that most complex of French balancing acts: to persuade a people hungry for transformation that real change has come, without rocking a social and economic system that has protected France from the worst effects of globalisation and neo-liberalism. His presidency will stand or fall on his ability to do both.

Essay by Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, City College of New York and Sciences Po, Paris

In the wake of Emmanuel Macron's stunning electoral victories in the French Presidential and Legislative elections earlier this year, many believed Europe had finally found the 'white knight' it needs to stave off the many political and economic problems that beset it: not just the rise of nationalist populism and the attendant threat of European disintegration, but also long-overdue economic reforms to liberalize labor markets and trim down the welfare state.

More generally, Macron's election was widely held to inject a new sense of dynamism in a familiar brand of 'liberal centrism' that had appeared to be losing much of its luster since the heady days of the 'third way' and 'globalization' at the turn of the past century.

Over the summer, these early enthusiasms seem to have cooled off a bit. Macron's approval ratings are now more or less where those of his predecessor, François Hollande, were a few months into his Presidency. Yet, Macron is still far from being as widely reviled and politically isolated as the previous 'last best hope' of European centrist liberalism: the ousted Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi.

If he is able to learn from some of his predecessors' mistakes, Macron may still manage to pass a few of the sweeping reforms he has announced. The question I would like to address here is whether this would indeed constitute an 'antidote' to the problems that beset contemporary European democracies, or should instead be seen as exacerbation of the same.

This supposes taking a step back and looking at some of the longer-term tendencies that have produced the current widespread sense of democratic *malaise* across Europe. My contention is that if we consider Macron from this point of view, he begins to appear more like a symptom than a cure of Europe's current political woes.

The collapse of most of Europe's mainstream political parties is often hailed as the occasion for a rejuvenation of the continent's democratic institutions. Parties are widely seen as opaque, corrupt, and hierarchical organizations, which hinder rather than allow the democratic expression of popular will. Still, it is not yet clear what can replace them in translating society's disparate interests and preferences into a set of comprehensive policy platforms between which citizens can meaningfully choose at the time of elections.

For the time being, the principal alternative seems to be individual politicians directly courting the favor of the electorate, through their personal charisma and claims of competence. The widely decried personalization of politics is the logical result, and with it the wildly oscillating fortunes of politicians, whose approval ratings are becoming as capricious as those of 'show-business' stars.

It is difficult not to see Macron as the latest ring in this chain. Widely considered an 'outsider' at the start of his Presidential campaign (although he had in fact already served as Minister of the Economy in Hollande's government), he rose to prominence on the heels of the massive unpopularity of France's two previously dominant political parties, the Socialists and the Republicans. Yet, it was never quite clear what the content of his political recipe, and social basis of support, would be.

As many commentators pointed out, the French voted for him primarily because he appeared 'new,' 'young,' and 'charismatic'–and also, of course, because he was perceived as a 'bulwark' against the *Front national*. But

this is hardly what a political platform is made of; when the French start realizing that Macron's polished image will not be able to paper over the hard political choices he is going to have to make as President, they may well turn against him as quickly as they did with his predecessors, François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy.

Closely related to the crisis of political parties and the 'personalization' of politics is the widespread contempt for partisan ideologies and the kinds of social conflicts they tend to elicit. Recent democratic politics have favored a pragmatic approach to policy questions, which assumes a fundamental consensus amongst citizens over basic values and long-term goals, so that politics can be understood as an exercise in finding and implementing the most effective policy 'solutions' to collective problems.

Even the much-reviled populists do not seem to step outside this pattern. Far from claiming to stand for a particular (i.e. partisan, and therefore contestable) set of values, they claim to stand *above* ideological disputes, representing the 'people' as a whole. From this point of view, it is striking to recall that Macron and Marine Le Pen both launched their Presidential bids in France appealing to the same slogan: *Ni Droite, Ni Gauche* ('Neither right nor left', although Macron then quietly changed his to 'Both right and left,' precisely to mark a greater difference from his principal contender).

The current French President is thus also visibly invested in the idea that ideological differences are a thing of the past, whereas what we need now is to solve problems in a pragmatic and efficient way. Apart from the fact that this begs the question of what 'solving' any specific problem actually means, the reason it appears problematic, from a democratic point of view, is that it leaves little room for a meaningful *opposition* to Macron's own policy choices. For, how could one be meaningfully against the 'efficient' solution of collective problems, which is in addition presented as an expression of the will of the 'people' as a whole?

It is perhaps not so surprising that political dissent over the past few decades has assumed what politicians like to call an anti-political character. For, if politics is reduced to the interplay between a 'populist' appeal to the people's will on one hand and a 'technocratic' appeal to competence on the other (as opposed to the ideological struggle between different value-based platforms), there seems to be no other avenue left for the expression of political opposition than criticizing 'the system' itself.

Finally, a further long-term tendency that has marked recent democratic politics across Europe is the concentration of power in the hands of the executive, at the expense of legislative bodies. Under the pretense that the kind of political deliberation that inevitably happens in Parliaments is at once unwieldy, opaque and susceptible to capture by special interests, we have moved towards a more 'plebiscitarian' model of government, in which executives rule largely by decree, and the people's role (whether through the legislative bodies or more direct mechanisms of consultation, such as referenda) is reduced to the expression of approval or disapproval, in most cases after the fact.

During his campaign, Macron made no secret of his desire for "a Parliament that legislates less and focuses more on evaluating the application of laws and the actions of the government".[1] Thus, the fact that, since assuming office, he has also proposed to introduce a 'dose' of proportional representation in the country's National Assembly may be interpreted as a move to further divide and weaken an already largely ceremonial

[1] Interview with *Le Journal du dimanche*, 9 avril 2017.

institution. Moreover, Macron's 'style' of government has already been made clear by the way in which he has set about having his proposed labor reforms passed: that is, asking the French Parliament to excuse itself from the process, by approving a measure that allows him to enact his desired reforms by decree.

The reason this too appears problematic from a democratic point of view is that it effectively by-passes the dimension of public deliberation, which–as democratic theory has long emphasized–is at least as important as voting in giving citizens a meaningful opportunity to participate in the process of collective self-government.

In sum, therefore, far from enhancing the hopes for a 'rejuvenation' of popular self-government, I take Macron's election to represent a synthesis of many long-term political tendencies that underpin the current democratic *malaise*. Can a symptom also be a cure?

Essay by Aline-Florence Manent, Queen Mary University of London

Raymond Aron and the Intellectual Origins of Macronism[1]

Newly elected French president, Emmanuel Macron, remains to many an enigma. That a political youngster who had never held elected office before was able to rise from relative obscurity to the presidency of the Fifth Republic in such lightning speed is surely surprising. But the most puzzling aspect of the Macronian conquest of power lies in the political ideology undergirding his political movement, *La République en marche*. Many commentators and analysts are still at pains to understand what "Macronism," which combines elements of the left and the right, actually is. Is it simply an opportunistic pragmatic stance with no fundamental ideological substance? Is there an internal coherence to the centrism hailed by Macron and his acolytes or is this "political ovni" merely advocating a centrist posture designed for the sole purpose to put its progenitor in power?[2] Or is there something besides air in Macronism?[3] And if so, is Emmanuel Macron's political philosophy fundamentally that new?

An exhaustive account of the ideas that shape Macron's sensibility cannot be provided within the scope of this essay. We can begin, however, by linking Macron to other intellectual and political traditions. Indeed, there are many intellectual precursors to the kind of centrism advocated by Macron. In this short piece, however, I would like to focus chiefly on the similarities between Macron's intellectual and political persuasions and those embodied several decades earlier by the political analyst and commentator Raymond Aron.

To this day scholars are still in disagreement about where to place Aron on the ideological-political spectrum: some argue that he was a conservative liberal and take his erstwhile support of Charles de Gaulle as proof that his political sympathies lay fundamentally on the right. Others argue that Aron's political outlook was closer to that of the left or that he was something of a hybrid figure: whether a 'liberal conservative' or a 'humanistic liberal.'[4]

[1] This essay is based on a paper titled "Tocquevillian Democracy in Postwar France and Germany" presented at a conference on Democracy and the Political: Raymond Aron Beyond the Hexagon on 5 May 2017 at the American University of Paris. For their comments, suggestions, and encouragements, I am especially grateful to Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, Stephen Sawyer, Danilo Scholz, Hugo Drochon, Iain Stewart, Or Rosenboim, Gwendal Châton, and Giulio de Ligio.

[2] AFP, « Emmanuel Macron, ovni politique à la conquête de la présidence française », *Le Pointe*, 16 April 2017, http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron-ovni-politique-a-la-conquete-de-la-presidence-francaise-16-04-2017-2120170_20.php.

[3] Romain Herreros, « Pour François Asselineau, Emmanuel Macron est un "sèche-cheveux" », *Huffpost*, 13 April 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/04/13/pour-francois-asselineau-emmanuel-macron-est-un-seche-cheveux_a_22038182/.

[4] See for instance Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992); Sanford Lakoff, "Tocqueville, Burke, and the Origins of Liberal Conservatism," *The Review of Politics* 60:3 (1998): 435-464; Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 2007); Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des idéologies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

If Aron is so difficult to situate politically it is because he was no ideologue. Aron was always suspicious of the dogmatism inherent to rigid ideological thinking. As he wrote again and again, to tackle political challenges effectively, one must first accept the inherent antinomies of liberal democracy and the imperfections of politics.[5] In a distinctly Aronian language, Macron has repeatedly insisted that democracy always remains incomplete and impure in practice.[6] Like Aron, Macron is wary of the utopian promises of those who claim to have discovered a magic potion (or, as he put it in the second debate, "la poudre de perlimpimpin") that will miraculously cure contemporary democracies of their supposed pathologies.[7] "Nothing could be further removed from my vision of politics," Macron wrote in his book *Révolution*, "than the stubbornness of the ideologue."[8] Like Aron, Macron prefers a pragmatic, realist, and meliorist approach to politics rather than blind adherence to a party orthodoxy. And like Aron, Macron's critics have unfairly claimed that his tone of rational moderation and his cautious pragmatism were yet another sign of his ideological spinelessness.

Although Aron hailed scepticism as a safeguard against fanaticism and intolerance, he was no relativist: accepting the imperfection of politics, Aron insisted, does not condemn us to inexorable decadence and moral relativism. Macron's political project has similarly been guided by a sense of impatience towards such fatalistic outlooks: Just because the political landscape of the Fifth Republic has traditionally been dominated by a centre right and a centre left party, there is no reason why this should continue *ad vitam eternam*, especially when these parties no longer reflect the ideological fault-lines running through contemporary French society. Our political parties "live off the retinal persistence" of a few obsolete ideas, Macron explained to *Le Un* in 2015.[9] Instead of doing the hard work of clarifying their ideological basis, the Parti Socialiste (PS) and Les Républicains (LR) either eluded the problem by brandishing lofty concepts such as "the Republic" "Gaullism" "the left" "the right" and expecting the words to do all the work, or sought an easy fix, for instance by importing the American tradition of primaries and expecting it to work like a charm.

Decades before Macron resigned from President Hollande's cabinet to found his own political movement—a move that was symbolically tantamount to slamming the door on the Socialist Party—Raymond Aron was equally exasperated by the fossilised state of the French Left. "The Socialist party," Aron wrote in his *Memoirs* in the early 1980s, "refuses the lessons of the century, rehashes old ideas and blatantly disregards" the common good. [10] By eluding the difficult and divisive questions, Aron feared that the Socialists would not only lose themselves but would "take France down with them by preferring their ideologies to the dirty

---

[5] Raymond Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

[6] See the interview "Macron, un philosophe en politique," *Le* 1, n° 64 (8 July 2015). Beyond the explicit reference to Paul Ricœur, the language shows Macron to be a reader of François Furet and Claude Lefort who were some of the most famous Aronian intellectuals.

[7] Amélie James, « «Pudeurs de gazelle», «poudre de perlimpinpin» : retour sur les expressions de la campagne », *Libération*, http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2017/05/07/pudeurs-de-gazelle-poudre-de-perlimpinpin-retour-sur-les-expressions-de-la-campagne_1567855.

[8] Emmanuel Macron, *Révolution* (Paris: Pocket, 2017), 41.

[9] "Macron, un philosophe en politique," *Le* 1, n° 64 (8 July 2015).

[10] Raymond Aron, *Mémoires* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010), 914.

constraints of the economy."[11] Aron thought that the Socialist Party—then newly in government—could ill-afford to cling to an orthodox socialism committed, in theory, to a class struggle aimed at a radical break with capitalism while, in practice, pursuing centre-left policies congruent with liberal values such as individualism, pluralism, the acceptance of market logic, and the separation of private and public spheres. As Marc Sadoun adroitly explained, there was a de facto ideological reformulation of socialism after 1989, yet, this was never explicitly acknowledged and enshrined in the party statutes (as the German Socialist Party had done in Bad Godesberg in 1959). "It is not clear that French socialists […] have overcome all absolutist temptations […] and this forestalls a fuller embrace of political liberalism," Sadoun wrote at the eve of the 2007 presidential election.[12] Hollande paid the price for this when he had to face a visceral opposition to his policies from within the left-wing of his own party, the *Frondeurs*. That by 2016 a social-democratic-liberal party was still found wanting in France helps explain the success of Emmanuel Macron.

The substantive core of "Maronian politics" is a social-democratic-liberalism. Although Macron's political platform might seem new in France, it is hardly original. [13] It is liberal in the sense that it values individualism. Nonetheless it does not fall back into a dogmatic faith in individual liberty but is attentive to the social and economic conditions without which political emancipation remains only an optical illusion. Drawing on Tocqueville, Aron was one of the most sophisticated exponents of such a political philosophy in postwar France. In his writings, Aron "attempted to set forth the necessary synthesis of two forms of freedom: the realm of autonomy left to individuals and the means that the state offer to the most deprived so that they might exercise their acknowledged rights." He saw himself as full-heartedly "egalitarian in the moral sense of the term" and emphatically denounced "social relations […] in which the hierarchy of status stifles a sense of solidarity."[14] Like Aron, Macron seems attentive to the economic and social conditions required for freedom and pluralism to persevere in liberal democracies and has little patience of corporatists privileges of any kind. Like Aron, Macron embraces the market economy, yet, he believes that the state (not necessarily in its nation-state form) has an ever-more-important role to play in compensating for the vicissitudes of globalized capitalism. Such third-way models are hardly new. But, to paraphrase Tocqueville, it is because the social-liberal party to which he belonged did not exist in France that Macron had to create his own.[15]

What is remarkable in the Macronian conquest of power, then, is that in a context of thriving populism, Macron was able to connect the grievances of French voters towards the political and economic establishment

---

[11] Aron, *Mémoires*, 914.

[12] Marc Sadoun, "Is Socialism Liberal? Democracy and French Socialist Ideas," *Dissent* 54:2 (2007): 77-81, at 80.

[13] I develop this at greater length in my book *Rethinking Democracy in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

[14] Aron, *Mémoires,* 993.

[15] Whereas in 1841 Tocqueville similarly deplored that "the *liberal but not revolutionary* party, which alone suits me, does not exist, and certainly it is not given to me to create it," Macron evidently took it upon himself to forge it. Letter from Tocqueville to Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard dated 27 September 1941, republished in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Selected Letters on Politics and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 156.

to a positive common narrative, one that remains resolutely pro-European and that openly seeks to uphold the values of tolerance, pluralism, solidarity, and freedom that postwar liberal democracies have been built on

Response by Michael C. Behrent, Appalachian State University

Macron: A Class Act

History as a discipline is often as described as being divided between 'lumpers' and 'splitters.' On this issue, I freely admit to being a lumper: I see no way to make sense of the Macron phenomenon without emphasizing the primacy of his neoliberalism. It is, consequently, from this perspective that I will assess the forum's (high-quality and engaging) papers.

Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti is, in my view, absolutely right when he claims that Macron is more a symptom than a cure for the ills afflicting European politics. At times, however, he downplays why this is so. Undoubtedly Macron's efforts to occupy the center while marginalizing contestation and overplaying executive power is part of the problem. But surely the heart of the matter is Macron's unapologetic embrace of the very pro-market, pro-EU policies that have, in recent years, elicited so much political opposition. I am, moreover, skeptical that "contempt for partisan ideologies" is a general problem in contemporary European politics. One of the main consequences of European integration is that it narrowed the space for partisan disagreement, as Chantal Mouffe has forcefully argued.[1] More peripheral parties like the National Front and *La France insoumise*, along with their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, are seeking, albeit in different ways, a new politics—and, implicitly, a new ideology—in an environment in which free-market liberalism has acquired an aura of inevitability. That Macron and Le Pen both identified as "*ni droite, ni gauche*" in no way implies a convergence of their opinions: the former intended it as a plea to overcome the petty differences blocking the realization a neoliberal consensus, while the latter was calling for the rejection of this very consensus.

Emile Chabal and Aline-Florence Manent both make sound cases that we should think of Macron as a liberal. Chabal seems on the mark when he suggests that the key to the new President's outlook lies not in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, but in the preferences of Macron's electorate—though I wonder if he does not overplay Macron's originality (as I suggest in my piece, most of the latter's ideas seem to draw on earlier attempts at liberal reform).

Manent makes a perfectly reasonable case that Macron's political outlook resembles the skepticism, moderation, and pluralism of Raymond Aron. Personally, however, I detect in the new president none of the tragic sensibility so characteristic of Aron and his fellow Cold-War liberals. Macron's glib optimism is, if anything, more reminiscent of Nietzsche's 'Last Man' ("'We have discovered start-ups,' said Macron. And he blinked"). Manent sees Macron as following Aron's aversion to "dogmatism inherent to rigid ideological thinking." But Aron witnessed first-hand the swan song of the age of ideology. What, at present, can remotely count as "ideological thinking"? Whatever intellectuals (presuming they even exist) are now smoking, it is not opium. Nor is there much ideology to be found in the insipid program peddled by the Socialist Party before it began its agonizing and rather embarrassing public death throes. Maybe the socialists never had a Bad Godesberg moment; but surely they more than made up for this "oversight" with Lionel Jospin's privatizations, Hollande's *politique de l'offre*, the *Crédit d'impôt pour la compétitivité et l'emploi* (CICE), and the El Khomri law? If that were not enough, cannot we say that the socialists broke ranks, once and for all,

[1] See Chantal Mouffie, *L'illusion du consensus* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2016).

with Marxism on 26 August 2014—the day that the "socialist" Hollande named Emmanuel Macron Minister of the Economy?

As for the rage driving populism: it may be visceral, and it may offer few coherent remedies. But populism is less an ideology than, as Emile Durkheim once said of socialism, "a cry of pain, and, at times, of anger."[2] Such outbursts should matter to liberals. If that's what Monsieur Macron is, let's hope they matter to him.

[2] Émile Durkheim, *Le Socialisme. Sa définition. Ses débuts. La doctrine saint-simonienne* (Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France,1992 [1928]), 37.

Response by Emile Chabal, University of Edinburgh

Macron, l'introuvable

One of the most interesting things about this forum is the obvious difficulty we all have at understanding who Macron really is. In my essay, I concentrate on the social and political forces behind Macron, but I studiously avoid painting too detailed a picture of him. The same is broadly true of Carlo Invernizzi Accetti's essay, which looks at the European context of Macron's victory, and Aline-Florence Manent's essay, which puts Macron in conversation with the great liberal intellectual Raymond Aron. Only Michael Behrent tries to get to grips with the man himself. His portrait is not a flattering one. Macron comes across as an unlikeable and incorrigibly classist vehicle for a dominant neo-liberal ideology.

While l do not agree with all of Behrent's analysis, I am sympathetic to his portrait. Just this week, Macron was caught telling a group of managers that workers in a local factory threatened with closure should see if they could find jobs in another factory nearby rather than "being a pain in the ass (*foutre le bordel*),"[1] It is inconceivable that this sharp put-down was a simple accident; there were microphones everywhere and Macron is too astute an image manager not to have been aware of them. So what did his words mean? Were they, as Michael suggests, yet another sign of his contempt for the poor, the destitute, and the idle? Or were they a calculated political gesture designed to shake the French into supporting his reforms?

Such questions of style and rhetoric were not terribly important before Macron became president, but they are now. Even in the absence of legible policies, all political leaders need a legible image. Few people can honestly say they know what Donald Trump's policy orientations are, but everyone can see the image he is trying to project. The fact that the four of us in this forum—all specialists of French politics—are finding it hard to work out who Macron is should give cause for concern. Not only is there the danger that Macron's inscrutability will alienate voters, especially on the left, but he also runs the risk of looking like a king without a crown. And that, as any French historian knows, is bound to end badly.

[1] LCI, « "Au lieu de foutre le bordel..." : la petite phrase d'Emmanuel Macron suscite l'indignation » (video), 5 October 2017, http://www.lci.fr/politique/au-lieu-de-foutre-le-bordel-la-petite-phrase-d-emmanuel-macron-suscite-l-indignation-2066485.html

Response by Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, City College of New York and Sciences Po

From Content to Style: Macron's Technocratic Populism

One thing the other three extremely interesting and stimulating contributions to this forum have in common is the claim that Emmanuel Macron is best understood as "liberal" of some sort.

Although there seems to be some disagreement on the specific *hue* of liberalism that best describes him– Michael Behrent focuses on a form of pro-business and anti-worker "neo-liberalism", Emile Chabal on the "chequered history of French political liberalism" and Aline-Florence Manent on Aronian "liberal conservatism"– the term "liberalism" keeps popping up in connection with Macron's name and his political project. I have myself described the latter as amounting to a form of "centrist liberalism" in my own contribution.

Upon reflection, however, I am beginning to form the opinion that this may not be very helpful in identifying what is *distinctive* about Macron and his political project. After all, as Chabal notes, "there have been many other liberal politicians under the Fifth Republic," from Valéry Giscard D'Estaing and Nicolas Sarkozy to Macron's right, to Michal Rocard and Dominique Strauss-Khan to his left. Behrent seems to suggest something similar when he writes that: "the ideas of France's youngest President are surprisingly old-fashioned."

Perhaps, therefore, what is truly original about Macron's presidency is not to be found in the *content* of his political ideology, but rather in the *style* of his leadership, and in particular in the kind of *discourse* he uses to legitimate it. I have tried to suggest something of the sort in my contribution where I claim that Macron's political formula is based on a synthesis of two discursive tropes that have increasingly characterized European politics over the past few years: 'populism' on one hand and 'technocracy' on the other.

What these two types of discourse have in common is precisely what appears to be most distinctive of Macron's style of leadership: an attack on partisan political divisions and ideologies in the name of a set of reforms that are presented as both 'objectively necessary' and long-desired by a 'silenced majority' of electors. To be sure, populism and technocracy are most commonly thought of as being *at odds* with one another–the former being portrayed as an appeal to the people's 'belly,' the latter to their 'reason.' However, to the extent that Macron does both, he may represent a new kind of politician that is in fact *both a populist and a technocrat* at the same time.

As well as trying to pin down the specific 'hue' of liberalism he stands for, it may therefore also be worthwhile to reflect on how the latter is being advanced through a new form of 'technocratic populism' that presents political ideologies and disagreement themselves as if they were things of the past.

Response by Aline-Florence Manent, Queen Mary University of London

As I re-read my own essay, several months now after it was drafted and in light of my co-panellists' engaging contributions, I was struck by its discordant tone: It rings as if it was written in a different key. Whereas my co-panellists are writing from a sharply critical point of view, my own analysis is informed by a more charitable perspective. Yet far more significant are divergences in method and actual object of inquiry. In my own contribution (written in the late spring, 2017), I tried to get to what Macronism might actually stand for. To do that, I used the most basic tools of an intellectual historian: scrutinizing the written and spoken utterances of one's object of study as a starting point from which to reconstruct their intellectual imaginary. Rather than trying to 'understand who Macron *really* is,' I am more interested in charting the ideas that have brought him to the Elysée and are already beginning to reshape French and European politics in profound ways. As many have noted here and elsewhere, Macron's ideas, like most ideas, are not *sui generis*. The most important question–and one that deserves more detailed attention–is this: what are the problems to which, according to a majority of French voters, Macronism seemed to provide the potentially most effective solution given the array of available choices?

Emile Chabal, Michael Behrent, and Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti have written more explicitly than I have about the context that, in their view quite tragically, brought Macron to power. There is nothing specifically French about this context. It is the same old litany that we have been hearing about since the Brexit referendum: the revolt of the economically aggrieved masses against the political, economic, and intellectual establishment who have pursued a self-serving 'neoliberal' agenda under the disguise of lofty political ideals such as liberalization, Europeanization, and tearing down borders of all kinds in the name of freedom. The only difference is that, in France, a shrewd and savvy young ex-banker was able to exploit the situation to his own advantage and, whilst claiming to be of both right and left, is pursuing the same-old neoliberal market-fundamentalist policies that got us there in the first place.

It is entirely plausible that, in due time, this *marxisant* interpretation will be confirmed. For now, however, the evidence to support such a claim seems rather slim. As recent analyses show, the cleavages that structure French society are far more complex than the simple wealthy vs. working-class dichotomy. One's objective socio-economic status is neither the sole nor necessarily the most important factor in determining voter preferences. Just as some voters may be attracted to an irresistibly charismatic figure, they may also, at times, vote for a specific set of political ideas out of conviction. Ideas and symbols are important. And it is not inconceivable that even working-class voters may be attached to Europe as a political and moral project, to take but one example.

Finally, I am struck by the tragic irony of (pre-emptively) prosecuting Macron for his inevitable inability to cure our supposed democratic ailments, when a central element of the diagnosis is the personalization of politics. When we limit our analyses to an investigation into the man himself and purport to uncover his inner-essence and true political persuasions from a handful of carefully selected remarks pronounced in photo-op events, are we not reproducing some of the very same characteristics of the hyper-personalization of presidentialist regimes that we denounce? When we take approval ratings to be a reliable indicator of the success or failure of Macron's politics, are our analyses not at risk of appearing as superficial as the hollowed out state of democratic politics that we deplore?