

Politics is Cruelty

In his magisterial *Making Comics*, Scott McCloud provides a profound exploration of human emotions. Anatomically speaking, there really are exactly *six* primary emotions: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise. McCloud even lists all of the facial muscles involved, but his visuals speak a thousand words each.



ANGER



DISGUST



FEAR



JOY



SADNESS



SURPRISE

NOW, SOME OF YOU
MIGHT BE THINKING:
"THAT CAN'T BE IT!
THERE ARE FAR
MORE EXPRESSIONS
THAN THOSE."



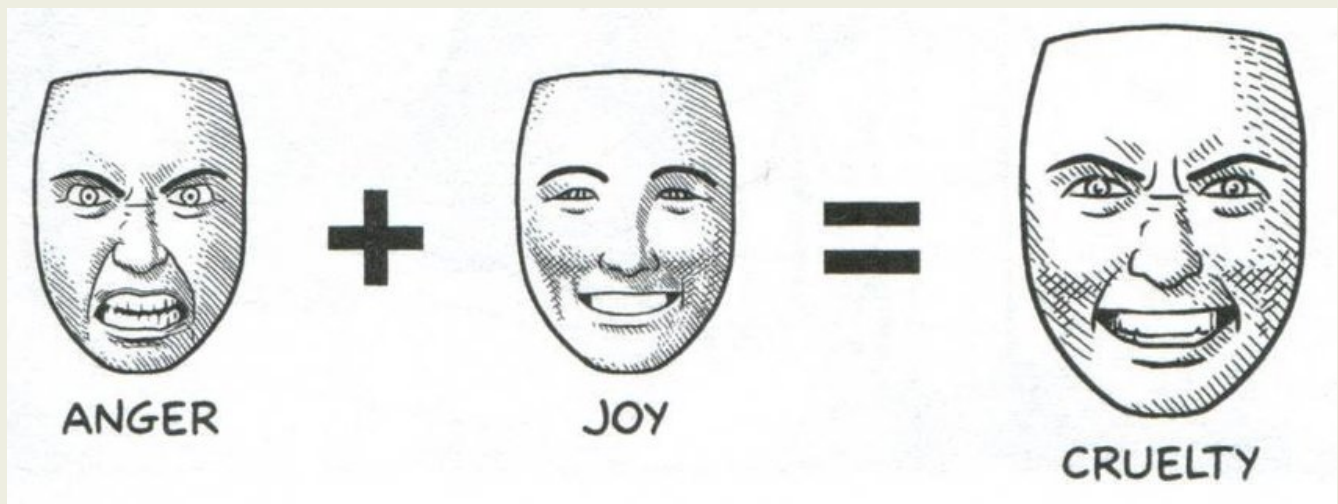
AND THERE ARE!
BUT JUST AS THREE
PRIMARY COLORS
CAN BE MODIFIED OR
MIXED TO ACHIEVE
EVERY COLOR OF THE
RAINBOW --



-- SO TOO CAN
THESE EMOTIONAL
PRIMARIES BE
MODIFIED AND
MIXED TO CREATE
MANY OF THE
EXPRESSIONS WE SEE
EVERY DAY.



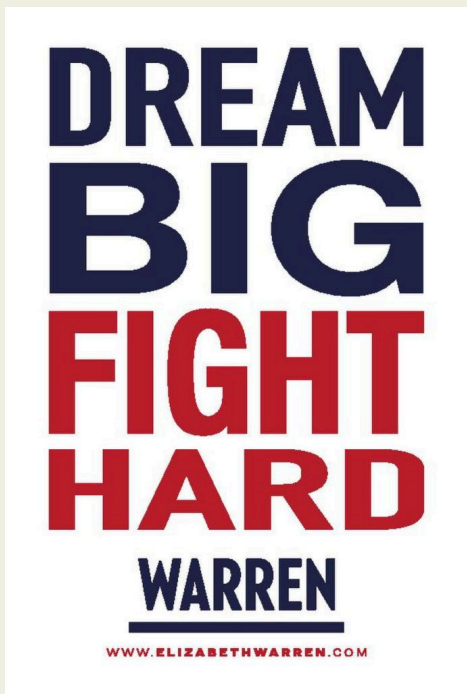
The six primary emotions, like the six primary colors, can all be combined. You can combine joy and fear to get “desperation.” You can combine joy and sadness to get “faint hope.” And you can combine joy and anger to get... cruelty. Take a look!



Spooky, right? Yet all McCloud is doing is *merging* all of the facial muscles of anger with all of the facial muscles of joy.

Now let's think about political emotion. Virtually every leader offers joy. I'm going to feed the children, heal the sick, and defend our borders. But virtually no leader offers *unadulterated* joy. Instead, politicians almost automatically combine hopeful promises with *threats against enemies*. If anyone gets in the way of our quest to feed the children, heal the sick, and defend our borders, let them beware. When pure evil stands between us and utopia, we *push back*. With all our righteous might. Because evil makes us angry.

To take one crystal clear example, here's a 2020 Elizabeth Warren poster. The top slogan evokes joy: “Dream Big.” The bottom slogan evokes anger: “Fight Hard.” Quintessential politics.



Without McCloud, you might sense a contradiction between these promises of joy and threats of anger. But even as a matter of basic anatomy, human beings are entirely capable of feeling joy and anger all at once. And to repeat, we have a name for this emotional fusion: Cruelty.

Cruelty is the main emotion that politicians pander to. And cruelty is what every politician strives to deliver. They don't want to make *everyone* happy. They want to make their friends happy *by making their enemies suffer*. Which requires them to not only identify enemies, but create an endless queue of enemies lest they run out.

That's why totalitarian states, after they imprison and and murder all their admitted opponents, never declare final victory. Instead, they launch a new search for enemies among their so-called friends. Capitalist roaders. Trotskyists. Rootless cosmopolitans. To declare final victory would be to abandon anger. And to abandon anger is to abandon politics. Cruelty is the lifeblood of power-hunger.

An old adage warns us that, "It is easier to destroy than create." Once you accept cruelty as the driving emotion of politics, you can see why politics as such is a trainwreck. Why? Because it is vastly easier to attack your enemies than to build a good society. Maduro and Ortega are, in a sense, successful politicians. Why? Because they've spent their careers battling their hated foes. They've driven their countries into the ground. They're further from prosperity and peace than ever. But they have given their merry warriors an epic struggle.

Some years ago, I wrote a list of "apolitical reasons to hate politics." To that list, I would

now like to add, "Cruelty rules." Politics doesn't just unleash human sadism. It anoints this ugly emotion. And warns us that if we refuse to find joy in anger, anger in joy will soon find us.