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Welcome to the Making Sense podcast, this is Sam Harris. OK, well, it is the day before the presidential election and I don't know why it has taken me this long to understand this. But you be the judge as to whether this should have been at all hard to understand. As all of you know, I've been struggling for years to understand how it is possible that nearly half of American society admires or at least supports Donald Trump. I've spoken with Trump voters in search of illumination, but illumination never came.

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For instance, I had Scott Adams on my podcast to explain this to me, and he described Trump as a master persuader, perhaps the best he's ever seen. But the problem for me is that I find Trump to be among the least persuasive people I have ever come across, whenever I see him speak, I see an obvious con man and ignoramus. In fact, Trump seems to be so unaware of how people like me judge a person's credibility that his efforts to appear credible, such as they are, always make him look ridiculous and even deranged.

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So the claim that he's a brilliant persuader makes about as much sense to me as the claim that he's a model of physical fitness would write. In my world, the claim can be disproven at a glance. And yet one thing is undeniable, right? Half the country views him very differently. Now, until a few minutes ago, I had more or less reconciled myself to never understanding this, but I believe at this late hour, on the very eve of the twenty twenty election, I have discovered a significant part of Trump's appeal.

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In particular, I think I finally understand how he is supported because of his flaws rather than in spite of them, that really is the key. How are all the things I find despicable in him, not merely things that people are willing to overlook, but reasons in and of themselves why people support him? That's what I didn't understand until this moment. Now, I have repeatedly described the man's flaws on this podcast to my eye, he lacks nearly every virtue for which we have a word wisdom, curiosity, compassion, generosity, discipline, courage, whatever your list, he's got none of these things, but his supporters know that.

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And he's a paragon of greed and narcissism and pettiness and malice, real malice. I mean, this is a man who wears his hatred's on his sleeve and he will suddenly revile people who he claimed to admire only yesterday. So while he demands loyalty from everyone around him, really above all else, he is an amazingly disloyal person. All of this is right on the surface. So his appeal has been a total mystery to me. But I believe I have now solved that mystery again.

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I don't know why it took me so long, because many of these thoughts have been in my head since the beginning. And I've certainly heard people describe some parts of this picture. But the whole image just fell into place for me, it's like one of those magic eye illustrations where you're staring at a random Dot Stereogram forever. And then finally the embedded 3D image just pops out in this picture of Trump's appeal is really best understood in comparison with the messaging of his opponents on the left.

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That's how you can see it in stereo. That's how the image finally pops out. So taking the Trump half of this picture, one thing that Trump never communicates and cannot possibly communicate is a sense of his moral superiority. The man is totally without sanctimony, even when his every utterance is purposed towards self aggrandizement, even when he appears to be denigrating his supporters, even when he's calling himself a genius, he is never actually communicating that he is better than you.

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More enlightened, more decent, because he's not and everyone knows it. The man is just a bundle of sin and Gore and he never pretends to be anything more. Perhaps more importantly, he never even

aspires to be anything more. And because of this, because he has never really judging you, he can't possibly judge you, he offers a truly safe space for human frailty and hypocrisy and self-doubt. He offers what no priest can credibly offer, a total expiation of shame.

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His personal shamelessness is a kind of spiritual balm. Trump is fat Jesus. He's grabbed them by the pussy Jesus, he's all eaten nothing but cheeseburgers, if I want to. Jesus, he's I want to punch them in the face. Jesus, he's go back to your shithole countries. Jesus. He's no apologies, Jesus. And now consider the other half of this image, what are we getting from the left? We're getting exactly the opposite message.

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Pure sanctimony, pure judgment. You are not good enough. You're guilty not only for your own sins, but for the sins of your fathers, the crimes of slavery and colonialism are on your head. And if you're a cis, white, heterosexual male, which we know is the absolute core of Trump's support, you're a racist, homophobic, trans phobic, Islamophobic, sexist, barbarian. Tear down those statues and bend the fucking knee. It's the juxtaposition of those two messages that is so powerful now, I'm sure many of you have understood this before me, but for whatever reason, this image just became crystal clear.

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Needless to say, everything I said about Trump previously still stands for me. I consider him to be terrifyingly unfit for office, and I consider most of his personal flaws to be public dangers. I think because of who he is as a person, he has harmed our politics and diminished our standing in the world to a degree that might take decades to repair. So I sincerely hope we rid ourselves of him tomorrow. But I believe I now understand the half of the country that disagrees with me a little better than I did yesterday.

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And it makes me less confused and judgmental. Less of an asshole, probably, which is always progress.