The Trouble with Being Earnest:
Deliberative Democracy and the Sincerity Norm*

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D URING his 2000 presidential primary bid, US Senator John McCain had
the words "Straight Talk Express" painted on the side of his campaign bus
and rode it around the county. McCain lost, but he attracted a huge following
of people who felt he was above partisan politics—a good old-fashioned straight
shooter. Our obsession with straight talkers is as vigorous as it's ever been;
McCain only crystallized something that has been a force in US politics for
years.[1] We glorify the courage to speak the truth plainly, making bestsellers out
of both Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* in 1776 and Bill O'Reilly's *The No Spin
Zone* in 2001. A search of US news sources in Lexis shows 520 hits for the term
"straight talk" between January and July 2004—most hits were politics-related,
but apparently we value straight talk in gardening, home-décor and sports. Also
telling is the recent interest among advertisers and marketers in "bullfighting,"
or the effort to purge "bull," "spin" and "pretense" from their messages to
consumers in order to be more "authentic."[2] Our collective anxiety about
political machines, spin doctors and outright liars leads us to seek truthful,
earnest speakers we feel we can trust.

Yet straight talk can actually pose certain dangers for democracy. The problem
here involves two interrelated questions. First, does our belief in the importance
of sincerity necessarily improve political deliberation?[3] Second, does our belief
cause us to under-appreciate other important communicative resources? Much
hinges on our answers to these questions because they deal directly with whose
voices are to be considered legitimate and authoritative in our public sphere. I
begin from a deliberative democratic standpoint: democracy is a logocentric
enterprise—that is, language is at the center of democratic political projects. So

[1]I am only familiar with this dynamic in the U.S. and therefore my examples of the phenomenon
are limited to that context. I am very interested to know if what I describe here is present in other
countries, especially given the reach of U.S. culture.
[2]See http://www.fightthebull.com/index.asp (accessed Jan. 11, 2005).
[3]The role of sincerity in personal relations is not my concern here; I am only offering a criticism
of sincerity's value as a political ideal.

it is critical that we pay attention to how we evaluate political words. Otherwise, not only can we not really understand what is going on in the public sphere, but we are also more likely to make poor judgments about what sort of speech and speakers make our democracy more robust.

To explore these questions, I begin with a look at the discourse ethics that underwrite much of deliberative democratic theory (section I). I go on to discuss some of the dangers that the particular ethic of sincerity poses for democratic communication. I argue that the emphasis on sincerity:

1) too easily collapses the relation between claims to truthfulness and truth claims and contributes to an undemocratic epistemology;
2) oversimplifies human psychology, ignoring the possibility of multiple and complexly related intentions;
3) denigrates "rhetorical" forms of speech; and
4) privileges a seemingly non-rhetorical mode of communication: hyper-sincerity.

Because it focuses on the role of language in democratic legitimation, deliberative theory is the obvious place to look to critique hyper-sincerity in public discourse. But in addition to not considering the potential pitfalls of sincerity (sections II.A–II.C above), deliberative theory as it currently stands gives us no satisfactory way to critique hyper-sincerity (section II.D). While the particular vision of deliberative theory here is drawn from Jürgen Habermas's concept of communicative reason, a variety of philosophers and political theorists work within this literature, including scholars who remain wary (as do I) of what they see as its idealizing speech norms. The fear is that certain of the theory's claims about deliberation prejudge the arguments that might be used, excluding participants or denigrating their contributions in unfair ways. This is especially troublesome given a context of continued inequalities and both outright and subconscious discrimination. This article is an attempt to build upon their critique (although not necessarily in ways with which those critics would agree) through an examination of one of the norms of communicative reason—sincerity. While remaining conscious of the reasons for such an ethic, I call into question the usefulness of the sincerity ethic for political deliberation (and thus question the dichotomies between sincerity and insincerity, as well as between rhetoric and argument). I understand that deliberative theory is a critical theory—a theory that offers an ideal that we often fall far short of and can use to critique— but it's the attention and critique that worries me, as well as the ways in which we fall short of the ideal. I end this essay with a brief plea for de-emphasizing sincerity in political discourse, drawing on Hannah Arendt to further spell out the dangers of trying to establish personal authenticity in politics (section III).

My criticisms, however, remain within the terms of the debates between deliberative democrats (or rather, between deliberative democrats and "communicative" or "discursive" democrats). I believe in the centrality of

communication for democratic politics and would like to see communicative resources and opportunities expanded. But I do want to warn against a particular vision of communicative reason, one that often distracts citizens from other issues (such as factual claims and normative appropriateness), as well as overly limiting our discursive potential.

I. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Deliberative democratic theory is a broad concern to a wide range of political scientists and philosophers and has come to dominate much of political theory in recent years.[4] There is also comparative empirical work being done on this topic now, as well as proposals for deliberative branches of government or other reforms to increase citizens' opportunities for deliberation.[5] While many diverse views belong to this branch of democratic theory, they all share a belief in the central role of language in democracy, either by interpreting existing democracy or explicating an ideal theory of deliberation.[6] In a deliberative democracy, we have "the institutionalization of a public use of reason jointly exercised by autonomous citizens."[7] The theory assumes preferences are formed/reformed through deliberation, rather than aggregated in the political "marketplace" as in the liberal model. The political system's power resides in words and reason, in contrast to the shared background of republican models. State power, then, remains bound by communicative justification.[8] This ideally originates in the public sphere (as opposed to formal institutions of government), cleansed of the

[4]See Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); James Bohman, "Deliberative toleration," *Political Theory*, 31 (2003), 757–79; Bohman "The coming of age of deliberative democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 6 (1998), 399–423; Bohman and William Rehg, eds, *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997); Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); James Fishkin and Peter Laslett, eds, *Debating Deliberative Democracy* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003); Amy Guttman and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, trans. B. Fultner (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001); Habermas, "Three normative models of democracy," *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Benhabib, pp. 21–30; Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. W. Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990); Habermas, *A Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy, 2 vols (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1984, 1987); Stephen Macedo, ed., *Deliberative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bernard Manin, "On legitimacy and public deliberation," *Political Theory*, 15 (1987), 338–68; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[5]See, for examples, Marco R. Steenbergen, Andre Bächtiger, Markus Spörndli and Jürg Steiner, "Measuring political deliberation: a discourse quality index," *Comparative European Politics*, 1 (2003), 21–48 and Ethan J. Lieb, *Deliberative Democracy in America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

[6]James Johnson, "Arguing for deliberation," *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Elster, p. 162.

[7]Seyla Benhabib, "Introduction," ed. Benhabib, p. 6.

[8]Mark Warren, "Deliberative democracy," *Democratic Theory Today*, ed. A. Carter and G. Stokes (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 176.

corrupting influences of money and power, allowing each citizen the equality already claimed constitutionally. This model underscores the activities of speech and judgment among ordinary citizens, rather than elites, substantiating calls for greater participation or associational models of democracy. It provides an explanation of the sources of democratic legitimacy, reminding us what is at stake with the constant pressure toward greater technocratization in the economically globalizing world. Deliberative democrats challenge what they see as the increasing power of instrumental rationality, with its treatment of sentient individuals as objects to be manipulated.

For many deliberative democrats, communicative action takes place against a backdrop of universal validity claims, or discourse ethics, that allow communication to run smoothly. Most simply, they are claims to truth, normative rightness and truthfulness. While many theorists presume sincerity to be an important part of deliberation, it is Jürgen Habermas who has provided the most prominent elaboration of this norm.[9] According to Habermas, "agreement in the communicative practice of everyday life rests simultaneously on intersubjectively shared propositional knowledge, on normative accord, and on mutual trust."[10] Different types of statements thematize only one of the validity claims at a time; for example, an expressive statement like "I feel" only explicitly raises the claim to truthfulness, while a claim like "that car is blue" only explicitly raises the claim to truth. However, "it is a rule of communicative action that when a hearer assents to a thematized validity claim, he acknowledges the other two implicitly raised validity claims as well."[11] So the sincerity claim is always in play, regardless of whether I assert it explicitly or not, or whether I am talking about my own feelings or am transmitting a fact to another person. When these norms are left unfulfilled, as they often are, other people can call the speaker to account, demonstrating that the speaker has corrupted the ideal of speech that legitimates democratic decision-making. Discourse ethics provides the basic logic behind human communication in the social sphere and thus always has a "steering effect" on deliberations, even when left unfulfilled.[12]

The value of sincerity is easy to see; we don't want liars and obfuscators to have a platform in our shared public sphere. The deception that might flow from a speech situation unbounded by norms of sincerity would seem to threaten the very possibility of a logocentric polity. Theorists often use "sincerity" interchangeably with "truthfulness" and "authenticity," which also calls to mind

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[9]In addition to Habermas, a number of other theorists explicitly discuss the ethic of sincerity. See, for example: Robert E. Goodin, "Sequencing deliberative moments," *Acta Politica*, 40 (2005), 182–96; Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 27; Gerry Mackie, "All men are liars: is democracy meaningless?" *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Elster, pp. 89–92; Steenbergen et al., "Measuring political deliberation," p. 26; Warren, "Deliberative democracy," p. 183.
[10]Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 136.
[11]Habermas, *A Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 121.
[12]Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 340.

the idea that a speaker is not hiding anything pertinent to the discussion; he is not only not deceitful, but the speaker also offers a complete account of the relevant information. He is what he claims he is, without complicating hidden designs on the discussion and without making false statements he knows to be false. Sincerity involves telling people what one thinks, not holding back pertinent details, and not lying. Sincerity also often involves a claim to not use rhetoric—to not try to strategically choose words in order to persuade, but rather to rely on the rational power of one's facts, one's sincerity and the normative appropriateness of what one says (see Section III.C for further discussion of rhetoric). One is sincere—that is, one's intentions are sincere, and so one has pledged to not misrepresent oneself in order to achieve a goal. Even if deliberative democrats didn't focus on it, I believe that most people assume sincerity is important for discussions. We expect people to not lie about their intentions and beliefs, to be sincere—rather than strategic—when telling us what they think.

Sincerity provides an avenue for accountability, central to deliberative theory. The crucial requirement of deliberative democracy is that participants in a discussion have a mutual respect for one another that renders them willing to justify their claims to one another in an open and equal setting.[13] Deliberative democracy rests on this recognition of a responsibility to give reasons and explain oneself to other members of the polity. It also requires listening to the reasons and objections of others; it is an interactive and potentially transformative activity, not just a resignation to presenting a reason for an action or belief and moving on.[14] This democratic belief in mutual accountability rests upon and requires universal moral respect (or equality or reciprocity). All those affected by political decisions should be included in the process and given equal political rights to communicate their ideas.[15] This democratic accountability provides the foundation for democracy; tyrants and dictators are not accountable, but democrats respond to the claims made upon one another. From Herodotus' distinction between democratic Athens and monarchic Persia (III.80) to the current calls for more participation and accountability in global governance, the concept stands at the heart of the democratic sensibility. But if we misrepresent our intentions and beliefs, don't we muck up this process of giving an account to our equals? So we need a way to assess the most fundamental qualities of speech. Discourse ethics is meant to provide an avenue for democratic accountability by making clear how one speaker can critique another.

When one disagrees with a speaker, it is because one finds her to have the facts wrong ("the United States has a proportional representation system"), or

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[13]See Guttman and Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*; Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*; Bohman, "Deliberative toleration;" Benhabib, "Introduction."

[14]I use "accountability" because it applies well to the expectations of government officials, as well as of citizens. Furthermore, "accountability" is etymologically related to an act of speech, highlighting the communicative aspects of this relationship.

[15]Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 23.

to be saying something we find ethically problematic ("democracy is a stupid form of government"), or to be disingenuous ("I fully support the Libertarian party," when the speaker has consistently not voted for the Libertarian party). These three communicative norms provide a rational foundation from which those given equal rights to speech acts in a polity can critique speakers and call them to account for what they say. In conjunction with formal mechanisms of accountability, such as sunshine and libel laws, re-election procedures and so on, discourse ethics provide the intellectual basis for accountability. It provides a way to ensure that when someone makes statements and is questioned by others, she is not providing false information with impunity. Sincerity in particular is meant to counter the potential for manipulative speech or outright trickery in a deliberative democracy. In a polity based on the power of words, the legitimacy of the process rests on the quality of information and ideas; dissemblers pose a particularly insidious problem for democracies. A speaker is expected to reveal her views transparently, shunning obfuscations, double-talk and cheap emotional (and strategic) appeals. When a speaker makes a claim, her sincerity can be taken to indicate her commitment to mutual accountability and democracy.

II. THE TROUBLE WITH BEING EARNEST

While I share the impulse to locate a rational foundation for political life and am deeply drawn to sincerity as a guarantor of communicative validity, there are several reasons to pull back from a full embrace of the ethic for politics. I acknowledge that sincerity may serve extremely useful and necessary functions in a variety of social contexts. When one appears in a law court or registers to vote, for example, one makes a pledge regarding the sincerity of one's intentions and the fullness of one's disclosure. Democracies often rely on such transparency; the ideal can serve to hold members of a community accountable to one another, creating the very possibility of binding decision-making. Václav Havel's "The Power of the Powerless" and George Orwell's "On Politics and the English Language," as well as his novel *1984*, implore us to recognize the importance of truth and to reject verbal obfuscations in political life. Yet being too mindful of sincerity poses certain problems for democracy.

Many deliberative democrats have recently come to acknowledge the ways a "gentlemen's club" of deliberation might be privileged by some conceptions of the theory:

> [W]e cannot *define* deliberation—as do some deliberative democrats—in terms of individuals' prior commitment to reasonableness, nor to their intentions to seek consensus, not even to their respect of opponents. Barring the epistemological and political problems of identifying such commitments, it would in effect depoliticize deliberation, limiting it to the easy kinds of politics that can take place once these commitments are secured.[16]

[16]Warren, "Deliberative democracy," p. 182.

But deliberative theory has yet to fully explore the extent of the "reasonableness" assumptions. Even for those who do not assume an ideal speech situation marked by civility and ending with consensus, sincerity still plays an important role in democratic communication. Yet a focus on the ethic of sincerity can lead to the sort of pathologies of deliberation that these theorists hope to avoid. Again, an unquestioned belief in the value of sincerity for political deliberation:

1) too easily collapses the relation between claims to truthfulness and truth claims and contributes to an undemocratic epistemology;
2) oversimplifies human psychology, ignoring the possibility of multiple and complexly related intentions;
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A. TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

There is a meta-discursive claim to "truth-telling" at work in the sincerity norm. The claim that one's statements conform to objective reality is posed by deliberative democrats as a separate validity claim (the truth claim) from the claim that one is telling the truth as one sees it (the truthfulness claim), but these two often converge.[17] While the distinction between sincerity and truth claims is important for analytic philosophy, the two are fairly indistinguishable in practice, as Habermas himself indicates.[18] If one is being sincere, then it is impossible to make a statement that one believes to be false. A truthful person cannot "really" state something that they do not believe to be true (although it is possible to "really" believe something that is not true). Sincere Speaker X may in fact be wrong, but cannot believe this to be the case while making that statement. An explicit claim to sincerity carries with it an implicit (meta-discursive) claim to truly know.

The sincerity norm actually entails two components: acting with sincerity regarding your own intentions and not casting doubt on the sincerity of others.[19] Of course, one should question validity claims that appear to be violated, but trust remains an important component of smoothly functioning communicative action. The participant calling the claim into question must initiate the disruption. Especially in instances in which the speaker's rhetorical style apparently conforms to "rational" argumentation, critics may be deemed uncooperative and distrustful, unable to continue a conversation. "Rational"

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[17]A similar claim can also be made in regard to normative rightness. As Plato long ago pointed out in the *Crito*, just because almost everyone in a society agrees on something, it is not necessarily normatively right. So consensus can become a substitute for moral appropriateness. My thanks to Gerry Mara for pointing this out to me.

[18]Habermas, *A Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 121.

[19]Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, pp. 64, 90.

qualities often include a demonstration of high literacy or expertise, the use
of abstract language (as opposed to storytelling or joking) and the use of
zero-degree or hyper-sincere tropes: styles that explicitly claim to lack any
rhetorical flourishes and claim that the words and reasoning themselves stand
alone.

Furthermore, Habermas acknowledges that the criticism cannot be made and
debated in certain cases, because of threats to the speaker's own ego and identity,
leading to the appearance of communicative consensus in spite of the fact that
the speaker has violated a norm.[20] To question someone's sincerity and to allow
your own sincerity to be questioned requires a tremendous psychological
capacity and goes against many of the norms of "polite society." In the end,
those questioning a speaker's sincerity may be branded "uncooperative," while
those who violate it may never have to redeem their claim. Whether criticism
increases or decreases often depends on the rhetorical style used by the particular
speaker, and, relatedly, the reputation of that speaker. Moreover, many of those
who might otherwise question a speaker avoid doing so because of an aversion
to conflict and the appearance of hostility.[21] This norm has especially affected
women's involvement in political discussions.[22]

If all communicative action implicitly rests upon mutual trust, then the very
claim to sincerity imposes a call for the listener to also accept the truth claim in
a statement unless he knows it to be false and explicitly questions it in discussion.
Given the enormous complexity of the issues that arise for deliberation in the
public sphere, there are many instances in which one would use the information
provided by others. Citizen Y is unlikely to have first-hand information on every
issue debated; she must depend on "expert" opinion, whether from academic
journals, newspapers or talk radio. The "truth" to which one has access depends
crucially on the supposed truthfulness of the speaker; the sincerity claim
underwrites the truth claims that lead one person to listen to Rush Limbaugh
for political insight and another to the BBC.

Because of this practical collapse of truth and truthfulness, the sincerity norm
can also contribute to a naturalization of the world. When we claim to describe
the world as it really is and ourselves as we really feel, we often implicitly make
a claim that discourse stands apart from the world. The world exists naturally,
there to be described. And my description, because it is merely words, does not
shape it. Joan Scott's discussion of "experience" makes a similar argument:
"what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or
she has lived through? It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as
uncontestable evidence . . . that weakens the critical thrust of histories of

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[20]Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, pp. 155–70. Families with asymmetrical
power relations provide an example of such distorted communication.
[21]Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (New York: Basic, 1980), pp. 34, 273–274.
[22]Pamela Johnston Conover, Donald D. Searing and Ivor M. Crewe, "The deliberative potential
of political discussion," *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (2002), 21–62, esp. pp. 54–5.

difference."[23] When transparency is assumed, we are less likely to probe the construction of the individual. It also creates an uncontestable claim—if one is truthful about one's experience, for example, how could competing or contradictory claims be legitimate? Who is going to disrespect the speaker enough to claim that they don't *really* know how they feel about their own life, especially given what we know about people's dislike of conflict and confrontation? The anecdotes that make up one's experience are not a transcription of actual events, however, and, even if they were, they are shaped by myriad social factors, many of which could have been otherwise. Moreover, memory is a malleable storehouse of knowledge; studies of eyewitness testimony have demonstrated the worrisome possibility that we may remember inaccurate or false information.[24] The easy acceptance of claims based on one's own lived experience can blind us to the possibility that not only are those experiences not *necessary* events in our lives, but also that our interpretations of experience create memories and stories that could be rather misleading when compared to actual events.

Because the sincere speaker shuns artifice, she is able to see the world clearly, while those who admit a place for rhetoric are prisoners of verbal illusions. This is like the complaint made of advocates of "political correctness." According to critics, they have constructed an artificial world through speech and aren't willing to say what is really there, instead making tortured rhetorical stretches to avoid offense. In contrast, the sincere speaker can see the world for what it really is. He is not trapped by discursive illusions and psychological confusion, but instead has a clear view of the *real world*. If the speaker can see the world clearly, why not trust him? And since the speaker is brave enough to refuse the demands of decorum, willing to tell it like it really is, he has proven his commitment to truth. Furthermore, this implies that there is a single world to be seen clearly and a single perspective from which to do the viewing. Like Machiavelli's comparison of himself to a landscape painter, there is a privileged vantage point from which to gain an understanding of *the* truth. The notion that the facts of reality may shift depending on one's perspective (and that these varying perspectives are legitimate) has no place. Since one should trust one's fellow citizen, and since some speakers are especially trustworthy and can understand the world for what it is, rather than what they want it to be, why all the need for public discussion?

B. The Certain Self

In his discussion of the realist rhetorical style (to which I will return later), Robert Hariman argues that in this style of professedly-sincere speech, "self-assertion is

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[23]Joan Scott, "Experience," *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. J. Butler and J. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 25.
[24]Elizabeth Loftus, *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

the essential speech act . . . once discourse . . . has been discarded as a means for completing a political scenario, and incapacitated as a source of political motives, the individual becomes the principle of cohesion by default."[25] The individual's authenticity, then, is the measure of validity, and the sincere speaker is one with an authentic, unitary self. She disdains ritual language, role-playing and fancy constructions, in favor of straight talk. This person is dispassionate—the assertive self is in control. The irrational emotions do not obscure clear thinking. Such a view helps reinforce a false understanding of our relationship with language as something standing apart from reality, a tool to be used in a descriptive (as opposed to productive) manner. It also helps privilege a stereotypically masculine style of talk—self-confidence, certainty and a seemingly dispassionate tone demonstrate the speaker's commitment to the discussion. Moreover, because the sincere speaker is unitary, there is no split self, no self-consciousness that would allow the speaker to manipulate her own words for greatest effect. Yet this ignores the fact that whenever we speak, we choose words—there are no necessary and natural political statements.

This emphasis on an individual's assertions oversimplifies human psychology, assuming that an individual's intentions are clear to the individual, stable and unitary (or at least not conflicting). It also assumes that the individual has ready access to the language that expresses her feelings clearly and that the meaning of those words corresponds to a stable intention in the individual. But we make statements contingently, stilling for a moment the constant flux and uncertainty of ourselves to say something. There are always gaps between what we are able to express and what is going on in a particular situation. Appreciating this complexity does not mean silencing ourselves or never making any positive statements, but rather understanding the nature of those statements, freeing us from the harsh burdens of constant certainty.

The sincerity norm takes for granted that a person only has one motive when engaging in discussion and only means one thing by what he says. However, there are many situations in which we say something and mean several things; this saturation of meaning is not a pathology of speech, but a rich resource. Instead of a straightforward, single intention that can be expressed simply, intentions may be multi-layered. In unintentional irony, a person is not even consciously aware of his expressed meanings (i.e., an alcoholic decrying marijuana use). By thinking about his multiple intentions in making such a statement (i.e., concern about drug abuse in society and an unresolved anxiety about his own past), he can come to a better understanding of his social world. At other times, the multiplicity of intentions may be known to the speaker—a political cartoon exists to both entertain and criticize. But the joking and hyperbole on which such cartoons rely muddy the idea of a single, transparent

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[25]Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 42.

intention. Storytellers and songwriters also come to mind—can we know their "true" intentions? In other situations, I may actually want or feel something for two reasons, one that the listener may find attractive and another that she may find unacceptable (i.e., a person supports an environmental regulation because it is normatively right, but also because the person's family member stands to earn a sum of money from its enforcement). Full disclosure becomes much more complicated and threatening; we have trouble imagining how the second motivation could *really* exist alongside the first.

A person may have multiple intentions when engaged in a communicative act; full disclosure may be impossible, too lengthy, or may obstruct the point of the discussion. Multiple intentions are not necessarily devious—they are often just a fact of human psychological complexity. Hidden or unclear intentions may compel the listener to a deeper engagement with the matter at hand, forcing an intellectual engagement that strengthens the group endeavor (and it may just as well fail). Further, the way in which one's intentions are perceived has its own impact. We cannot fully determine how other people will perceive what we do or say. In light of this, we must make our understanding of communicative validity more complex—otherwise, critics can too easily discredit certain speakers as insincere, uncooperative or devious. For example, if one uses irony or joking in a communicative endeavor, one may be thought of as obscure or as lacking seriousness. This can occur in two ways. First, the very use of irony or joking may signal (erroneously) to the listener that the speaker does not take the matter seriously. Second, practices like irony, parody and sarcasm are often misunderstood, leading to confusion about the message of the work.[26] But irony also relies on this duality—a straightforward joke is unlikely to be one that is funny or intellectually stimulating. What is crucial here is that the intentions of the speaker are not entirely transparent; what looks like insincerity may actually be a useful mode of communication. This is not to say that irony is necessarily a "better" form of speech than straight talk; things called "ironic" may also be flip, anti-political or self-defeating. Instead, I want to highlight the difficulties of thinking of political communication in terms of motives and intentions.

One may argue that irony is parasitic on sincerity—that is, irony is only irony because we usually assume that people are being sincere. But irony can be more complicated than that. In the type of irony I have in mind, we don't really know what the ironic speaker means. It is not a simple matter of taking the meaning to be the opposite of what is expressed; the ironist may mean exactly what she said, may mean the opposite, or some combination of the two.[27] According to

[26]For a good example, see the letters posted to the website authors at www.blackpeopleloveus.com (accessed July 28, 2004).
[27]For examples of the alternative views on irony see: Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony* (New York: Other Press, 2003); Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). For more on the difficulties of defining irony, see: D. J. Enright, *The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Zoe Williams, "The end of irony?" *The Guardian*, June 28, 2003.

Alexander Nehamas, "irony consists simply in letting your audience know that something is taking place inside you that they are not allowed to see . . . [leaving] open the question whether you are seeing it yourself."[28] Instead of being parasitic on sincerity, the best irony calls the usefulness of the distinction between sincerity and insincerity into question. Irony can help people appreciate that "all literal statements mislead," helping to develop the intellectual tools needed to combat the hyper-sincerity discussed below.[29] Given its instability, it seems logical that there might be instances in which irony or joking are unacceptable, as when one appears in a law court. If our attention to sincerity might be relaxed a bit, when is it appropriate to do so? However, to decide beforehand under what circumstance or how irony should be deployed would be to fall again into what we want to avoid—prejudging the reasonableness of arguments. We cannot know beforehand what particular configuration of circumstances and personalities might call for irony. The force of irony—what makes it unique and powerful—is its strangeness and its spontaneity. Often, the objects and recipients of irony would much prefer that the ironist refrain from using it; Socrates' irony was underappreciated, to say the least.

C. ADMITTING RHETORIC

Finally, a variety of modes of speech are often omitted from deliberative democracy—modes that have distinct roles to play in political communication. Young has pointed out the absence of greeting, rhetoric and storytelling in deliberative democratic theory.[30] Dryzek likewise argues:

> Some deliberative democrats, especially those who traffic in 'public reason,' want to impose narrow limits on what constitutes authentic deliberation, restricting it to arguments in particular kinds of terms . . . A more tolerant position, which I favour, would allow argument, rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony or storytelling, and gossip. The only condition for authentic *deliberation* is then the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in non-coercive fashion. This requirement in turn rules out domination via the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda, deception, expressions of mere self-interest, threats (of the sort that characterize bargaining), and attempts to impose ideological conformity.[31]

We still need to better understand why there is such opposition to admitting rhetoric and exactly what the stakes are. I believe that the disagreement surrounding the place of rhetoric in deliberation stems from the notion that the use of rhetoric brings into question one's sincerity. A common way to impugn

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[28]Alexander Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 71–2.
[29]Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 275.
[30]Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Benhabib, pp. 120–135; and *Inclusion and Democracy*.
[31]Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, pp. 1–2.

an opponent's motives is to claim that they are using "rhetoric." They are pandering, playing with words in order to win (this idea has deep roots in Western political thought: it is Socrates' apparent criticism in the *Gorgias*). For critics, rhetoric is insincere—it is language specifically chosen (instead of emanating naturally) in order to persuade. Rhetoric involves an acknowledgement that words are chosen and tied to a particular situation and audience. And if one's words differ depending on who is listening, then language is strategic, which calls into question the purity of deliberative motives.

Meanwhile, other deliberative democrats argue that they either do not banish rhetoric from the public sphere or that rhetoric has no place in certain areas of it. For example, Benhabib argues both of these points:

> Each of these modes [greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling] may have their place within the *informally structured process of everyday communication among individuals who share a cultural and historical life world.* However, it is neither necessary for the democratic theory to try to formalize and institutionalize these aspects of communicative everyday competence, nor is it plausible—and this is the more important objection—to build an opposition between them and critical argumentation. Greeting, storytelling, and rhetoric, although they may be aspects of informal communication in our everyday life, cannot become the public language of institutions and legislatives in a democracy for the following reason: to attain legitimacy, democratic institutions require the articulation of the bases of their actions and policies in discursive language that appeals to commonly shared and accepted public reasons. In constitutional democracies such public reasons take the form of general statements consonant with the rule of law. The rule of law has a certain rhetorical structure of its own: it is general, applies to all members of a specified reference group on the basis of legitimate reasons.[32]

Yet it is not clear that Benhabib has *not* built an opposition between the other modes and argument, as she seems to disallow greeting and storytelling. This passage also limits deliberative democracy to the formal spheres of government, which is certainly not the sole originating location of understanding in a democracy. Benhabib's deliberative democracy here consists of statements formally promulgated by such institutions, which is odd since she elsewhere favors a decentered public sphere model.[33] She bars rhetoric from the "public language of institutions," which remains only a small component of the cacophony of deliberative democracy. The language used in this arena must be pure and abstract, cleansed of the corrupting and particularizing influences of rhetoric. But one of deliberative theory's most appealing aspects is that it helps explain opinion formation throughout society, not just in the formal "core." And surely the average citizen is more likely to encounter associational life and mass media on a regular basis than the formal institutions and statements of government. Moreover, something like greeting surely has something to do with

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[32]Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference*, pp. 82–3.
[33]Ibid., 73–4.

the cooperation and conflicts that exist in legislatures prior to promulgations of law (as US Vice President Cheney and Sen. Patrick Leahy would surely attest after their June 2004 exchange on the Senate floor, in which the Vice President told the Senator to "go f*** yourself"). The titles of bills, the preambles and "Findings" sections of legislation and Supreme Court opinions, for example, often contain narrative and imagery—sometimes helpful, sometimes troubling— that many would characterize as rhetorical.[34] Finally, it is not clear that the ideal of language purged of such elements would necessarily be more "commonly accepted" and legitimate.

While often perceived by critics to be a distinct element of speech, rhetoric is a quality of all (human) language use, one that is thoroughly intertwined with any utterance. Since the "linguistic turn," we know that all communication bears a relationship to the social context in which it is uttered. In contrast to the claims of hyper-sincerity, "all language is already artificial, all speaking is unplain by design."[35] There is no speech that is completely natural, unchosen and necessary. Each statement has rhetorical elements by virtue of the fact that it appears in our world and has an effect based on its particular expression and context. Pace Young, I argue that rhetoric is not really a separate class of communication from storytelling and greeting, but rather a master category by which all statements can be dissected and understood. Sometimes rhetoric is used more self-consciously than at other times (the point of classical rhetorical study), but it is always a part of communication. Just as storytelling and humor have rhetorics, so do mathematics and social scientific analysis.[36] So we do ourselves a disservice to believe that rhetoric could ever be separated from communication, unhelpfully idealizing a false possibility that empowers those who would deploy hyper-sincerity (whether consciously or not). All arguments should be recognized as charming stories to some extent, narratives constructed by speakers to explain how they see the world. Rhetoric depends on context, which always exists (for humans at least), and to acknowledge rhetoric is to recognize that statements and speakers are always situated. In different contexts, the same statements can mean very different things; the same delivery affects different audiences in diverse ways. This situation is an unavoidable feature of being human. I speak quite differently at an academic conference than I would in rural Louisiana. To speak in the same way at both locations simply would not make sense. Both the occasion and the audience are different and the wrong voice would unduly limit

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[34]See, for example, the 2001 USA PATRIOT ACT (HR 3162); or *Texas V. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397 (1989), in which Chief Justice Rehnquist's dissenting opinion abounds with narrative and rhetorical language.

[35]John Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 110.

[36]See the work of D. N. McCloskey for more on the rhetoric of seemingly abstract and scientific statements: D. N. McCloskey and Robert M. Solow, eds, *The Consequences of Economic Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and *The Vices of Economists, The Virtues of the Bourgeoisie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996).

the prospects of being heard. Modes considered "rhetorical," like storytelling, joking and greeting, can be quite appropriate in a particular context and in fact may help protect us against those who take the sincerity norm in deeply undemocratic directions.

Yet for many deliberative democrats, there is a sharp line between sincere (and therefore true) speech, which leads to a democratically legitimate end, and other forms of speech. If these norms of communication are intentionally violated, action moves to a strategic level in which behavior is influenced not by the power of words, but by the imperative of "maximizing gains and minimizing losses in the context of competition."[37] Yet many things may be at work in a speech situation. No form can *a priori* be judged to ensure truth and democratic legitimacy; they must be judged in light of the complex relations between speakers, language and political reality.

It is important to note the connection between the privileging of "abstract" argument and the dismissal of certain speakers. The norm of "sincere" speech makes certain assumptions about truth and perspective that discount those who seem overly passionate, those who draw on mythical narratives of a shared past, or those who seem uncooperative; while these forms may invoke sincerity in ways I still find problematic, their utterances are differently figured than hyper-sincere modes discussed below and therefore recast as suspicious or dangerous. These voices have more often belonged to historically marginalized groups, e.g., women, African-Americans, Latinos, youth. Meanwhile, those same elements that legitimate exclusions remain in the accepted dialogue; their declarations of truthfulness and use of hyper-sincere tropes serve to justify their authority and shut out other voices.

D. Manifestations of Hyper-Sincerity

In contrast to "rhetorical" forms of speech, like expressions of anger or joking, two styles of hyper-sincerity dominate the public sphere: the cult of plain speech (CPS) and the "realist" rhetorical style. These tropes take the tendencies discussed above to their most extreme. They make truth claims through a unitary and simple self, able to objectively see the world for what it is; their sincerity is proven by their expressed opposition to rhetoric and artifice and use of a "plain" style of speech. While deliberative democratic theory certainly does not *cause* the problems I discuss below (if only theory had such effects!), it perhaps leads us down a path where we cannot appreciate such problems; it also does not give us the language or tools to critique hyper-sincere modes.

Haiman identifies a "cult of plain speech" in the contemporary United States that prizes seemingly straight talk—short words and simple grammar that cut

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[37]Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, p. 13.

out the ornament and (appear to) get right to the meaning. Haiman connects this phenomenon to the historical rejection of rhetoric in the West, as well as to a hyper-masculine and anti-intellectual American culture. This style is seen as more honest than expressly rhetorical modes of speech:

> Real men will tolerate the jibberjabber of fluent wordsmiths—lawyers, pundits, spin doctors, poets, speech writers, admen, schoolmarms, journalists, politicians, therapists, highbrow academic nerds (in a word *wimps*)—only with contemptuous reluctance and always view them, if they view them at all, with the thinly veiled disdain which the salt of the earth reserve for "the croissant crowd;" gigolos, maitre d's, feminist performance artists, and Woody Allen. In the company of such men, it is a badge of virility to flout the rules of grammar of the only language you know; grammaticality (to say nothing of multilingualism) is for sissies.[38]

People who speak "plainly" are seen as more natural and real, and therefore more trustworthy. They can hold others to account because they are not confused by the temptations of fancy words. Rhetoric is denigrated to the point that a rustic, folksy style is affected.[39] Yet this plain spoken quality is something that is cultivated and practiced like any other speech. We learn, whether consciously or not, to dress our speech plainly to take advantage of the credit that this style can procure for a speaker. Of course, and as Haiman points out, this style is most suited to the American tough *guy*—one who, through the speech if nothing else, is (like) a "common" person. Whether it comes from George W. Bush or a farmer, this style takes on the credibility of the farmer—plain, unaffected, and, perhaps most importantly in politics, *real*. Voices that do not fit this model are suspect, often shut out of the conversation.

The realist rhetorical style takes this one step further. Like CPS, it proposes to rid the world of the artifice of rhetoric, making a meta-discursive statement that self-authorizes the text and limits potential critics. But the realist style also makes certain assumptions about the social world as a place dominated by self-interested actors, natural laws and necessary choices imposed by the situation or *fortuna*. Hariman's description of realist rhetoric in Machiavelli's *The Prince* is instructive: "This style begins by marking all other discourses with the sign of the text: It devalues other political actors because they are too discursive, too caught up in their textual designs to engage in rational calculation." It aligns itself with the "real, natural" world by claiming objectivity and transparency. It "affects a lack of affectation" and thereby acts as a zero-degree trope; it does not admit a power to move you through its artistry with words, but claims to do so through its clear depiction of reality.[40] A "realist" text, then, purports to be a description of reality and to be therefore immune from charges of bias. It

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[38]Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap*, pp. 102–106, 107.
[39]See, for example, Geoffrey Nunberg's analysis of G. W. Bush's pronunciation of "nuclear" as "nucular." Nunberg argues that this particular pronunciation is a "folk etymology," an affected and intentional rhetorical choice. *Going Nucular: Language, Politics, and Culture in Confrontational Times* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
[40]Hariman, *Political Style*, pp. 17, 19.

relies on a separation of discourse and reality, arguing that a speaker's statements are just reflections of the "real world," not contributions to that reality. The author's truthfulness serves an anti-democratic purpose, closing the open discursive space required for democracy.

Hariman identified the realist style with Machiavelli, but notes that it is used by a variety of speakers, and "operates as a powerful mode of comprehension and action in the modern world."[41] James Arnt Aune argues that it is "the default rhetoric for defenders of the free market. The realist economic style works by radically separating power and textuality, constructing the political realm as a state of nature, and by depicting its opponents as prisoners of verbal illusions."[42] Elsewhere, I have documented the use of this rhetorical style by the World Bank to defend economic globalization.[43] If the world is defined by natural laws and can be objectively described, then it is the realist voice that can be trusted to provide this description. The realist speaker can see the truth, has no other designs on the situation other than helping you out, and will not use fancy language to confuse and convince you (like other people do). Rather than respect fellow citizens, the realist plays the part of big brother, patronizing their intelligence while lauding it (in their ability and bravery in recognizing a frank person like the realist).

Machiavelli, however, also provides us with an interesting twist—reason to doubt the sincerity of realist rhetoricians. Machiavelli himself claims to be artless and to reject the conventions of his time in writing *The Prince*. Unlike others, he will tell the Medici how things really are:

> I have not ornamented this book with rhetorical turns of phrase, or stuffed into with pretentious and magnificent words, or made use of allurements and embellishments that are irrelevant to my purpose, as many authors do. For my intention has been that my book should be without pretensions, and should rely entirely on the variety of the examples and the importance of the subject to win approval. I hope it will not be thought presumptuous for someone of humble and lowly status to dare to discuss the behavior of rulers and to make recommendations regarding policy.[44]

Of course, his later claims about the need for the appearance of artlessness while deceiving calls these opening lines into question. Machiavelli explicitly calls on the prince to cultivate the appearance of nonchalance and to conceal his motives in order to appear natural.[45] Machiavelli offers numerous examples of

[41]Ibid., 13.

[42]James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), p. 40.

[43]Elizabeth Markovits, "Economizing debate: rhetoric, citizenship, and the World Bank," *Poroi: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetorical Analysis and Invention*, 3 (#1) (2004).

[44]Machiavelli, "Letter to Vettori," *Selected Political Writings*, ed. and trans. D. Wooton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), pp. 5–6

[45]Hariman, *Political Style*, p. 32. See also Victoria Kahn, "Virtu and the example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Representations*, 13 (1986), 68–83; and Eugene Garver, "After *Virtu*: rhetoric, prudence, and moral pluralism in Machiavelli," *Prudence*, ed. R. Hariman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), pp. 67–97.

successful leaders who gave the appearance of power and control in order to gain it and who acted graciously while plotting against their guests. Virtù does not consist in excellence of character in the Aristotelian sense, but in the ability to employ the correct appropriate image at the right time for personal political success.

Machiavelli's denigration of decorum and rhetoric is also belied by his letter to Vettori. Here he paints a picture of his perfect evening, where:

> I take off my work clothes, covered in mud and filth, and put on the clothes an ambassador would wear. Decently dressed, I enter the ancient courts of rulers who have long since died. There I am warmly welcomed, and I feed on the only food I find nourishing, and was born to savor.[46]

This is someone who loves the ritual of his evening, the fancy clothes and the decorum he feels is merited by those he truly respects, Dante and Ovid. Yet his dedication to Lorenzo de Medici in *The Prince* claims to lack the ornament that Machiavelli here acknowledges as an important component of a decent social life. Likewise, Mary Dietz argues that *The Prince* is a "masterful act of political deception" meant to bring down the author's enemy, Lorenzo de Medici.[47] According to this interpretation, Machiavelli's own claims to truthfulness are insincere and serve as a mask to hide that very fact. What better way to deceive than to claim truthfulness by relaying the techniques of deception to one's enemy? Machiavelli deploys his realist rhetoric twice—once in his explicit message arguing for the prince's appearance of nonchalance while using deception to fulfill the imperatives of necessity, and second in his own practice of his advice, which ironically calls the intentions of the first message into question.

III. CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

If accountability coupled with widespread equality is the cornerstone of democracy, then language plays a central role in our politics because it allows the communication that creates accountability. And if language is the means by which we hold one another accountable, then it seems critical to maintain a sense of ethics in speech, a way to criticize one another that is mutually acceptable. Yet, speech remains an imperfect and frustrating medium. When we try to pin it down, its protean qualities come shining through, betraying our attempts to make language work for us without having to bow to its own demands. While emanating from our collective concern with truthfulness in politics, the realist rhetorical style and CPS serve to hinder democratic deliberations. In particular,

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[46]Machiavelli, "Letter to Vettori," p. 3.
[47]Mary G. Dietz, "Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the politics of deception," *American Political Science Review*, 80 (1986), 777–99.

the realist voice is an aggressive and intimidating way to shut out other voices. If the goal of the sincerity norm is to honor the imperative of universal moral respect by enabling democratic accountability, the manifestations of hyper-sincerity discussed here should give us pause.

For these reasons, it is important to shift attention away from the speaker's sincerity and intentions to our own capacities as listeners and readers. One can implore and critique a speaker on behalf of "validity claims," but ultimately it is only through one's own intellectual efforts that one can judge what the speaker may be saying. While trust can be important in deliberation, thoughtful skepticism may be of greater consequence. Constant and potentially exhausting engagement is the price we pay for democratic communication. Still, we don't want to give up the possibility of truth in politics. We want to be able to hold one another accountable for what we say. If listening and judgment are crucial for discerning the usefulness of a particular utterance, what are the criteria for this judgment? Why do I still shy away from the language of sincerity? Why not look for the deeper sincerity that underlies seeming divergences from the ideal, like in irony? Haven't I confused false sincerity and true sincerity? I want to conclude with some brief responses to these objections, drawing from Hannah Arendt. I look to Arendt because of her emphasis on communication, as well as because of her concern about both the importance of truth in politics and the dangers of a search for hypocrisy.

The most fundamental problem about someone's sincerity is that it is truly unknowable. Steenbergen et al. acknowledge this aspect of sincerity; it is therefore omitted from their measure of discourse quality.[48] Arendt discusses this issue at length; she posits that our inner lives are obscure places, ones that cannot be fully known by another human. Judging the true motives of another person, let alone finding out what they are, becomes impossible:

> Whatever the passions and the emotions may be, and whatever their connection with thought and reason, they certainly are located in the human heart. And not only is the human heart a place of darkness which, with certainty, no human eye can penetrate. . . . To be sure, every deed has its motives as it has its goal and principle; but the act itself, though it proclaims its goal and makes manifest its principle, does not reveal the innermost motivation of the agent. His motives remain dark, they do not shine but are hidden not only from others but, most of the time, from himself, from his self-inspection, as well.[49]

A fellow citizen's soul remains opaque and unreadable to us; part of the beauty of democracy is that, unlike the totalitarian state, democracy gives us the freedom to have a private life apart from our public one. In Chapter 2 of *On Revolution*, Arendt addresses "The Social Question" and includes an important discussion of "hypocrisy and the passion for its unmasking." Because she

[48]Steenbergen et al., "Measuring political deliberation," p. 26.
[49]Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 96–8.

conceives of politics as an arena in which "being and appearance are indeed one and the same," she is no fan of hypocrisy, calling it the "vice of vices."[50] She nevertheless warns against trying to root it out, citing the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. She claims it is actually impossible to disclose one's innermost motives, mostly because they also remain hidden to the person acting. The hunt to find the hypocrite is a search for the "natural person" behind a mask. Taken to its extreme, this search leaves all without a legal persona by which to appear in public. How can we be sure we've found the *real* motivations? Where does this search end? Who is the purest one of us? The urge for sincerity calls into question the very legitimacy of the performativity of political life, denying us the ability to be actors and instead demanding a stripped-down authenticity that leaves no room for the public *persona* that provides us legal protection and the possibility of political equality.

But this does not leave us without a way to criticize falsehood in the political sphere. What is crucial is that our efforts be focused on the public person. Words and deeds are the real substance of political life and can be criticized on the basis on their correspondence to factual truth, their consistency and the ethical outlook they disclose. But to move from criticism of an action to criticism of someone's inner life makes assumptions about our own powers of discernment and about the role of appearances in politics that I'm not convinced are worthwhile risks in a democracy. It may be futile to try to discern what a person "really" thinks (just as it would it not be enough to rely on what a speaker claims to "really" think). Judging the factual truth or normative appropriateness of a statement is actually easier than trying to discern the speaker's trustworthiness. We can also look to whether a person's words correspond to her actions without assuming that this consistency is a measure of something deeper (sincerity). Yet oftentimes politics seems mired in an effort to find the most "real" people at the expense of a deeper engagement with the facts and moral claims that provide real substance to political life. If I disagree with someone or find him inconsistent, how useful is it to get into an argument about who is more sincere? The argument more often dissolves into cynicism and a termination of discursive space. If someone lies, let us pay attention to the way the arguments violate facts (or previous claims or ethical norms), for what liars have on us is that they are willing to lie, committed to concealing their true intentions. We cannot be afraid to call out wrong facts, to connect issues to social structures and positions of privilege, and to the values we want to promote. We will fight with one another about facts and social constructs and ethics. But that's different from imputing motives to others. When we start talking about the true intentions lying behind appearances, we enable the hyper-sincere speakers, rendering citizens cynical and apathetic instead of skeptical and involved.

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[50]Ibid., pp. 98, 103.

In the end, I suggest that we take a tragic view of sincerity; that is, it is irresistible for good reasons, but somehow remains incommensurable with our human reality and our needs. The idea of a stable master form of deliberation, against which all others can be judged, may be just another instance of pandering to our desires—the desire that democracy could be hassle-free, like a new appliance. Meanwhile, the current emphasis on sincerity in political life has negative consequences for how we structure and interpret the public sphere. Whether one is interested in interpreting existing democracy through deliberative theory or in creating truly deliberative settings for citizens, it is important to take these considerations into account so that we neither overlook nor recreate the inequalities that deliberative theory is meant to counteract. It's not that I want to take away John McCain's campaign bus or our own desire for truth in politics, but get us to reflect on these judgments, what goes into making them and what they may cost us.