



The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech, and Democratic Judgment

Elizabeth Markovits

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A growing frustration with “spin doctors,” doublespeak, and outright lying by public officials has resulted in a deep public cynicism regarding politics today. It has also led many voters to seek out politicians who engage in “straight talk,” out of a hope that sincerity signifies a dedication to the truth. While this is an understandable reaction to the degradation of public discourse inflicted by political hype, Elizabeth Markovits argues that the search for sincerity in the public arena actually constitutes a dangerous distraction from more important concerns, including factual truth and the ethical import of political statements.

Her argument takes her back to an examination of the Greek notion of *parrhesia* (frank speech), and she draws from her study of the Platonic dialogues a nuanced understanding of this ancient analogue of “straight talk.” She shows Plato to have an appreciation for rhetoric rather than a desire to purge it from public life, providing insights into the ways it can contribute to a fruitful form of deliberative democracy today.

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