



# The Rhetorical Surface of Democracy: How Deliberative Ideals Undermine Democratic Politics

*Scott Welsh*

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Citizens, political theorists, and politicians alike insist that political or partisan motives get in the way of real democracy. Real democracy, we are convinced, is embodied by an ability to form collective judgments in the interest of the whole. *The Rhetorical Surface of Democracy: How Deliberative Ideals Undermine Democratic Politics*, by Scott Welsh, argues instead that it is our easy rejection of political motives, individual interests, and the rhetorical pursuit of power that poses the greatest danger to democracy. Our rejection of politics understood as a rhetorical contest for power is dangerous because democracy ultimately rests upon the perceived public legitimacy of public, political challenges to authority and the subsequent reconstitution of authority amid the impossibility of collective judgment. Hence, rather than searching for allegedly more authentic democracy, rooted in the pursuit of ever-illusory collective judgments, we must find ways to come to terms with the persistence of rhetorical, political contests for power as the essence of democracy itself. Welsh argues that the impossibility of any kind of public judgment is the fact that democracy must face. Given the impossibility of public judgment, rhetorical competitions for political power are not merely poor substitutes for an allegedly more authentic democratic practice, but constitute the essence of democracy itself. *The Rhetorical Surface of Democracy* is an iconoclastic investigation of the democratic process and public discourse.

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