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Sincerity: How a Moral Ideal Born Five Hundred Years Ago Inspired Religious Wars, Modern Art, Hipster Chic, and the Curious Notion That We All Have Something to Say (No Matter How Dull)

R. Jay Magill Jr.

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A *Wall Street Journal* Top-Ten Nonfiction Book of 2012 and a *New York Times* Editors' Choice

A cultural and intellectual history of sincerity, from its emergence during the Protestant Reformation to its present incarnations and adversaries.

People have long been duped by "straight-talking" politicians, confessional talk-show hosts, and fake-earnest advertisers. As sincerity has become suspect, the upright and honest have taken refuge in irony. Yet our struggle for authenticity in back-to-the-woods movements, folksy songwriting, and a craving for plainspoken presidential candidates betrays our longing for the holy grail of sincerity.

Bringing deep historical perspective and a brilliant contemporary spin to Lionel Trilling's 1972 *Sincerity and Authenticity*, R. Jay Magill Jr. argues that we can't shake sincerity's deep theological past, emotional resonance, and the sense of conscience it has carved in the Western soul. From Protestant theology to paintings by crazy people, from French satire to the anti-hipster movement, Magill navigates history, religion, art, and politics to create a portrait of an ideal that, despite its abuse, remains a strange magnetic north in our secular moral compass. 10 illustrations

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