

THE TECHNOLOGY OF HYPOCRISY

BY THOMAS W. HAZLETT

Half the world thinks that the United States is being stuffed into the trash compactor of history because Japanese capitalists are investing in American assets, and half thinks that the key to turning South Africa's rulers from monsters to liberals (*assume* a difference) is to cash out all U.S. investments in Johannesburg. Miraculously, it's the *same* half.

That one boisterous set of individuals can be pitifully wrong is no big surprise, nor is the fact that loud self-contradiction may dominate conventional wisdom. As Nietzsche once observed: "What *everyone* believes, is never true." But that people can hold two polar-opposite positions that are both at right angles with Truth—now there is a feat. If veracity does lie between two extremes, to find two extremes which are equally false takes a dedication to precision rare in today's fast-paced consumer society.

Evidently, a great number of our fellow citizens are mining deeply into rich oxymoronic deposits. The Race Police have hit the Mother Lode, of course; it has become virtually impossible in these States to carry on a discussion involving ethnicity without having a vector of patronizing racist generalizations deployed (e.g., "Hispanics want this," "the Eskimos need that," "South African whites deserve what they get") in the campaign to smash "white racism" (which is itself considered, racistly, a redundancy). But various veins of competing hypocrisies stretch for miles.

The First Amendment is now consistently defended by no more than, perhaps, seven U.S. citizens. Even *Spy* magazine considers the evidence appalling: "Some people who supported Robert Mapplethorpe's artistic expression wanted to silence Axl Rose or Andy Rooney or subway beggars; the Florida sheriff who went after the 2 Live Crew album ignores equally foul records by Andrew Dice Clay; and many of the same people who disapprove of symbolic red dye thrown

by right-to-lifers approve of symbolic red dye thrown by antifur activists."

But this sort of hypocrisy is mundane in that it is transparently opportunistic and in that it takes time to pull off. One could even claim that one had changed one's world view in the intervening moments. Or just forgotten the old logic. And one could pretty much go on like that for a lifetime, oscillating between metaphysical beliefs according to political payoff. What takes much better focus on the hypocrisy du jour is to actually spin around 180 degrees within the very *same* issue. That takes some head muscle.

Consider, on the disinvestment question: Japanese capital flows "make America dependent on foreigners," while American investments "subsidize South Africa." Good try, but the analytical contradiction crosses different issues that no one ever bothers to connect. Yet did you catch the promenade of Nelson Mandela through the Americas last summer? This political *objet d'art* made a grand tour expressly designed as a quest for continuing, and even beefing up, economic sanctions against South Africa.

Mandela's most talented pronouncement was in response to the very cautiously whispered question regarding ANC support for Messrs. Castro, Kadafi, and Arafat. Mandela strongly asserted that he need not justify strategic alliances to Western audiences; such self-interested bargains necessary in the liberation struggle are *none of our Western business*. (On the way home, while visiting another strategic friend, Kenyan dictator Daniel arap Moi, Mandela waxed philosophical: "What right has the West, what right have the whites anywhere to teach us about democracy...?" at the very instant that his host was rounding up democratic agitators beyond the palace gates.) While lobbying for U.S. sanctions against a foreign power, he snaps at any suggestion that the political realities within that

sovereign nation should even be a question for discussion among those of us too far away to understand the first thing about them. And the irony goes undetected! Now that's rich.

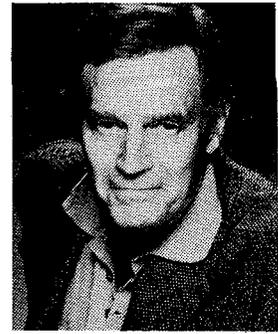
But patriotic juices may yet flow, because the U.S. State Department performed the self-contained hypocrisy just as flawlessly as had Mandela. (And from the opposite perspective, demonstrating that the whole family can play this game.) Prior to Mr. Mandela's visit, the department's spokesperson allowed as how the current U.S. sanctions against South Africa were excellent public policy, but if Nelson had strong views about where George Bush ought to go from here, he should be careful not to lecture the president about it, because we Americans don't take kindly to *outside interference in our domestic policymaking*. Rewind: While crafting foreign policy to punish another nation's domestic policy, *we* will not stand for any meddling from foreigners.

What took Mandela an entire paragraph (and two or three continents, really) to turn into a *reductio ad absurdum* was turned into a sparkling self-parody by the U.S. Department of State in *one single sentence*. Call me a super-patriot, but I say America's information factories can pour out this product. So let's entice the Japanese to invest megabillions in this hypocritical absurdity technology and so weaken the U.S. economy that no American investor will have the wherewithal to float the Afrikaners a dime, thus striking a death blow to apartheid. I might inquire why Mandela didn't think of that to begin with—but it's really *none of my Western business*.

Contributing Editor Thomas W. Hazlett teaches economics and public policy at the University of California, Davis. This year he is a visiting scholar at Columbia University.

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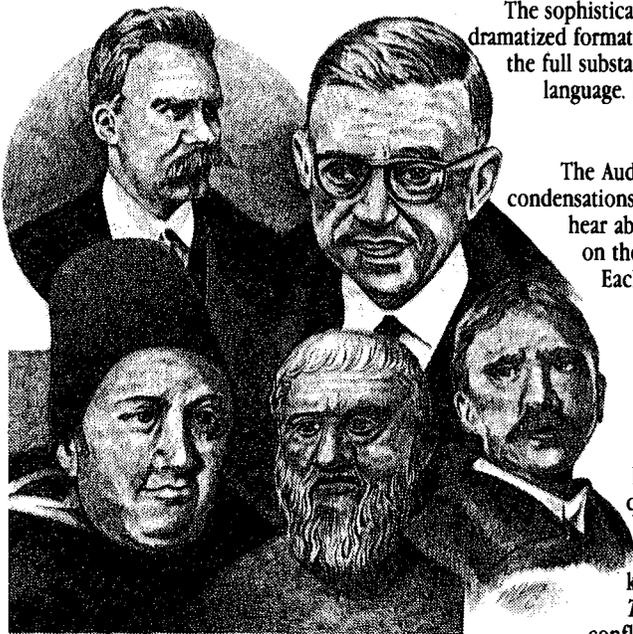
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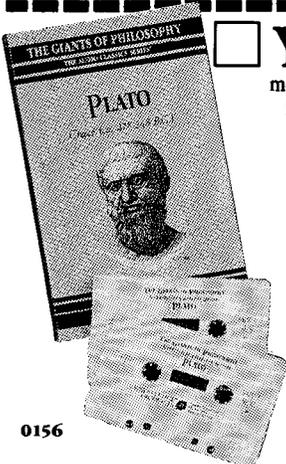
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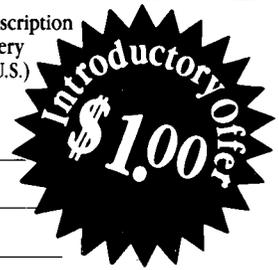
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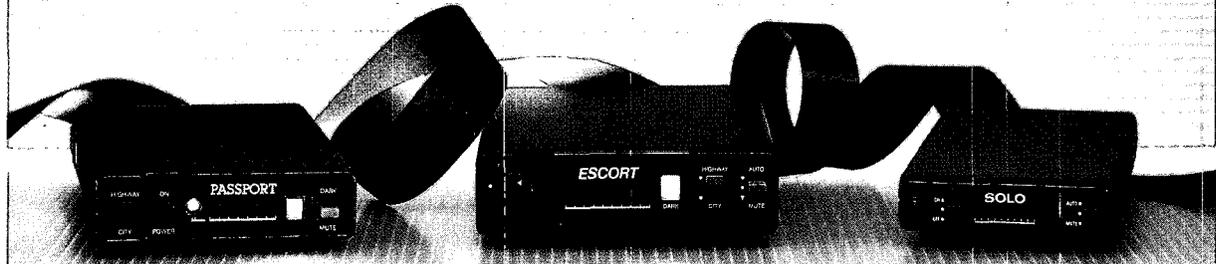
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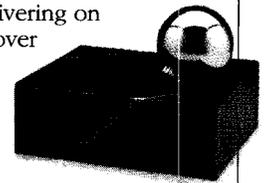
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