

An Old Debt to a Pariah

by

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Translated by J. Glenn Friesen

The original page numbers are indicated in square brackets. Footnotes are Dooyeweerd’s except where indicated by my initials JGF.

[161] Among artists there are several we can point to who have, rightly or wrongly, acquired the reputation of a “*bête noire*” in certain groups, who would just as soon send these artists into the desert, forgotten by God, and with the mark of pariah on their foreheads. It seems that among musical teenagers and intensely artistic dilettantes it has gradually become “good form” to provide certain *epitheta ornantia* [descriptive words] for the name of Richard Strauss, the modern hero of technique. In spite of these descriptions, the words affect the mundane public like a finely stimulating scent of eastern spices or like the sensation of Turkish boudoirs with soft-coloured carpets. That is what occurred with Zola, and also with Balzac, as well as with the unfortunate Oscar Wilde. And yet I would want to maintain that the highly developed moral feeling of many of these critics, who use the words ‘perverse’ and ‘decadent’ would not be able to refrain attending a performance of *Salome* or *Der Rosenkavalier*, even if they attend by stealth, with who knows what blush of embarrassment. And perhaps they will find, to their secret regret, that the performance is not so terribly filled with sexuality and decadence. The more serious critic and those who are experts in the area will smile at these fiery philippics; such a person sees through them and answers with a laconic “Oh, come now!” But what will he say of those who are even more extreme than these rather

comical “moral judges,” and who simply describe the whole area of art as being “evil,” although they will admit that they have never acquainted themselves with it. For that’s how it is with the attitude of Calvinists with respect to the stage. Indeed the debt that needs to be settled with this pariah [the theater] is not just from recent times. It seems our fate to have to live in constant enmity with the theater and its artists; it is the nightmare of our worst prejudices, like the hand of someone who is [162] asleep, which can be lifted up but which then always falls back inanimate to the body with the blunt force of a natural law.

In the preface to his reference work *Theater und Kirche in ihrem gegenseitigen Verhältnis historisch dargestellt*, Dr. Alt expresses this in a biting sharp way: “Theater und Kirche! klingt es nicht den Meisten wie Belial und Christus?”¹ [Theater and Church! doesn’t it sound to most people like Belial and Christ?] And if we are honest, we will have to admit that this contrast has not been set out too strongly for the believer’s consciousness, although the conversation might be somewhat more reserved.

It is therefore with little optimism that we yet again take up the plea for the apparently already lost cause of Christian theater. But we eschew the unspirituality of a certain kind of dead orthodoxy, which sounds the trumpet of danger when the current of a new and powerful life shakes its foundations; this dead orthodoxy does not understand that every birth awakens a new intensive emotion.

That is why we want to let our voice be heard, although this may at first be like a voice crying in the wilderness. Seeing around us the unwilling glances of many of our co-religionists, and feeling from all sides the cold expectation of suspicion, we want to convince you by our warm faith that there are no obstacles to reach this goal.

We call on all those who love what is truly beautiful, and to all our fellow Christians, to no longer remain silent, but to fight with us for the Christian ideal, that wants to fulfill the whole world with the light of a new spirit. For everyone who pays attention to what goes on around him can feel how a great many of our fellow believers are already busy

¹ Heinrich Alt: *Theater und Kirche* (Berlin: Verlag der Plahnscher Buchhandlung, 1846), 1.

changing their attitude towards the theater. The Roman Catholic Church, which often had the sharpest eye out for the future, and with true seamanship knew which side the oar had to be placed, [163] was the first to note the powerful currents and took measures in order to turn the threatening enemy into an ally For some time there has been news—and does one really understand what it means?—that the two most prominent Roman Catholic newspapers in our land, *De Tijd* and the *Maasbode* would start publishing theater reviews in their columns. And from these circles we also hear how much spirituality has attempted to lead the movement, and how under its direction many societies have been formed; these societies, which are filled with love for this art that has too long been reviled, had only been waiting for a powerful organizer in order to then play an important role. Smulders is an artist whom one must reckon with, even in other circles and so we see this new current grow before our eyes. The question is now allowed, what is Calvinism doing? Well, we have always also taken our hand to the plow, but only in order to formulate new objections, in order to better hide our lack of initiative. For us, Goethe’s “Geist der stets verneint” [Spirit that continually denies] still rules. And where one sees the impossibility of an absolute attitude of enmity, Calvinists have found another clincher, which is supposed to silence the forces arising in our circles: “We are not in principle against the theater, but only against the theater in its present form.” The phrase sounds splendid, but don’t be fooled, for diplomacy hides behind it. That appears most clearly when you take it to its conclusion.

For the conclusion of any reasonable person can only be this: You are only against the corrupt expressions of today’s theater. Well now, try then to purify it of its wrong elements, and if you cannot do that, then act like your Roman Catholic fellow believers and create your own theater!

But now here is the trick [“de app komt uit de mouw”]: the monkey comes out of the sleeve]; the attempt to put us off with the powerless advice: We really cannot exercise any influence!

Is this a view of a powerful life of faith or does it rather show a miserable lack of energy? We express no [164] judgment, but we begin by looking back to past history, for which we would ask your attention.

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* * *

It is peculiar that when we look at the history of how theater began in various cultures, we find almost everywhere a highly religious origin. We can say at the start that a truly dramatic art can only develop where the human will elevates itself above fatalism, and in a certain sense where the will chooses its own position with respect to the metaphysical powers above it. Only then is conflict possible, a conflict that must end with the destruction of the world. Only then can a shuddering emotion take hold of the human spirit to view and follow [in drama] the wrestling against the unknown—whose vengeance was already heard approaching in its prelude tones, as the far murmuring of an inundating flood. In this sense, the Greek people created drama, and what was peculiarly dualistic in their religious life first came to expression in tragedy. Here the worship of Apollo as the god of light was seen to be a deceitfully beautiful veil that hid the deeply pessimistic depths of the Greek soul. We may presuppose that it is well known that there was a religious origin of both tragedy as well as comedy in Greek art, and of their high character whereby their performance became a religious duty. The Socratic spirit, which gradually penetrated the theater—the spirit of “Why?” and “Where to?” led to the destruction of Greek theater, and what was taken over of it by the Romans was merely a sad caricature, which was soon superseded by the bloody gladiator sports and the pernicious mime-games [*mimenspiel*]. In a certain sense, the downfall of theater was the result of the collapse of ancestral belief, and when the mysterious background disappeared, the spectacle externalized itself as sensual splendour and pompous games of sensation. In other cultures that had [165] developed the art of theater, we also see the inspiring force at work in the religious background; this force kept what was arbitrary outside the bounds of the theater and the deepest inner life of the people was immediately revealed. The Indians [Hindus], with their aptitude for contemplation, set resignation [*berusting*] as the *summum bonum* [highest good]; they therefore did not share in the wrestling that has its origin in resisting the divine will. From out of their own resources, they could never have

developed tragedy in the sense that we understand it; some writers say that the theater of the Hindus is simply an imitation of the Greek.²

* * *

It is really difficult to deny that Indian [Hindu] theater has its own character, which nevertheless refers to an already earlier developed characteristically Buddhist art³ and it is most interesting to see how closely religion was connected with it. By this means, theater often propagated Vedic philosophical contemplation. In the already referenced work, Dr. Alt refers at p. 204 to the typical “Randi” or prayer with which the prologue often opened. And he says further, “Just as in the practice of beginning with such a blessing, so too the plays themselves expressed everywhere the character of the Indian people, and its religiosity determined its entire spiritual development.” The legend of the origin of their art can serve as a proof of how little the Indians viewed their theater as a work of darkness. According to legend, this art was a discovery of Bharata, a Muni (an inspired sage). It was the god Brahma who took this art from the Vedas and gave it to these Muni, who in turn taught the Gandharvas and Asparas (spirits and nymphs in Indra’s heaven); with music and dance they gladdened the world of the god Indra, who was regarded as ruler of the lower heaven or of the atmosphere.⁴

* * *

The theater of the Chinese, which like the Indian has something very peculiarly its own that can only be [166] remotely compared with European art, developed from out of a mimic dance accompanied by words that were recited or sung in a definite way, and illustrated with simple music. These dances were performed at religious festivals, just as they still took place for some time in Canton. (I don’t know whether this peculiar practice

² JGF: this seems an incorrect view of Hindu drama. Dooyeweerd does not give the source for this view.

³ JGF: Hinduism preceded Buddhism. Dooyeweerd is claiming here that Hindu theater was based at least in part on Buddhist art.

⁴ See Wilson: *Das Theater der Hindü*, p. 35 ff.

has been maintained). So here, too we find the mysterious background of the metaphysical world, which gave the impetus for the birth of dramatic art.

But everywhere one also sees at the same time how theater shares the destiny of religion; when the flame of its inspiration is extinguished, theater loses its deepest meaning, the sober symbols of the show and its *décor* disappear, and the people, who no longer understand the invented images, calls for noisy sensation, for luxurious dazzling costumes, for fiery dragons and grotesque miracle deeds. Then come the unavoidable consequences of this degeneration: the decline of acting, the degeneration to a kind of charlatan, who prostitutes his natural gifts for the pleasure of the people, and who in societal life is marked with a fiery mark: of infamy and lack of character. The writer commenting on the Chinese theater Tcheng-ki-Tong writes about the coming situation of actors in China: “En Chine, le métier de comédien est absolument dépourvu de considération.”⁵ [In China, the profession of comedian is absolutely outside consideration]. We then see how the Heavenly Kingdom has not known how to safeguard itself from the danger of an inferior class of comedians.

The circumstances everywhere are about the same: As soon as the emancipation of the theater has been completed, religion becomes the repelled pole, which is made greater the longer there is a separation. And although religion is itself the origin of the art form that rejects it, with little self-respect religion makes the judgment that the theater is “from evil.”

It was understandable that in the first centuries of its development that the Christian church had to take [167] such a hostile attitude with respect to the theater, which it found given over to the Romans and Greeks. It is not only that comedy had become buffoonery and tragedy had become melodramatic bombast, nor that the “*histrionen*” [actors] had known how to carry out their reputation of sensuality to such an extent that the Roman law had declared them to be “without honour,” nor that the stage created its roles so true to nature that Hercules was once really burned up, and a later Christian emperor played

⁵ See *Théâtre des Chinois* (Paris: Calman Leve), p. 20.

the role of “Leda and the swan” in shameless nudity.⁶ It was that the character of this level of amusement for the people was *heathen* and this was a very understandable reason for spirituality to set itself with all its force against the theater’s eloquence.

If we see this properly, then the polemics of the church fathers, which Calvinists always prefer to use in arguing their objections, stand in a totally different light. No reasonable person in that first time would have thought to plead for this sickly remainder of heathen culture; the battle of Augustine, Chrysostom and so many others was directed against a foolish power, the fiery sensuality of a people that had not always taken their conversion seriously, the bestial tendencies of a public that against its better knowledge, rewarded the actors and actresses that appeared before it with applause and flattering words even for the most vulgar dramas, a public that did not refrain from demanding of the players that they dance naked in the performances, and later with hypocritical piety shunning them as a pestilence.

Although I am not fond of giving many citations, I will cite in support of my assertion an uncommonly sharp quotation from Chrysostom, who as is well known, was the least vehement among the church fathers. He literally says the following about the playhouse audience:



I say, how can they make me believe that they have seen them (i.e. the actors) without evil desire? Where there are [168] frivolous and immoral motives, love songs and speeches that incite lust? On the stage are persons with eyes full of adultery, rouged cheeks and all in all such an attitude in body and costume and they create incitement for lust; yes, everything that one sees and hears there is intended to enchant and to inflame those who are present; the audience, lewd and confused is completely taken in both at the beginning as well as at the end by the poisonous and lust-inciting manner of speech. The trumpets and the kettledrums, the violins and the flutes and such merry music help to enchant and blind their hearts. By this, the deceit of the sensuality creeps more sweetly in the souls, and weakens all powers of conscience. In this way, those who are present, even without the caresses of *whores*, are already outside of themselves, and more easily

⁶ Dr. K. Hase: *Das geistliche Schauspiel* (Keipzig, 1858), p. 3, 197.

prepared for impure lust and more easily ensnared.⁷ (my translation from Dooyeweerd's Dutch translation).

I will for the moment admit that the church fathers have perhaps made the colours somewhat too black, and that perhaps in their time there were also better plays that were performed, which nevertheless shared a this damning condemnation [*vloekvonnis*]. In any event, this generalization was here infinitely more appropriate than our time, and the nature of theater was in the eyes of every reasonable person a pathological situation, a center of social injustice.

That men like Augustine and Chrysostom never made attempts to improve the theater, and that they continued to take an absolutely hostile attitude towards it is not something for which we can reproach them, as one must do in our case; I will give two reasons for this, which in turn weaken all references to these statements [of the Church fathers] to the situation in our time. In the first place and as already indicated, there is the circumstance that for them the idea "theater" was identical with "paganism" and with the heathen views that for a long time continued to be held on stage. The word "Christian spectacle" [169] would have in fact sounded to them like a *contradictio in terminis*, or as a temptation by the antichrist to lead the community away from their King. And in the second place, their preaching still remained almost entirely in the line of world flight; they listened only to the voices from the other side: the high mysticism of their soul turned their eye away from the "*Diesseits*" [this side], and they viewed earthly life as only of minor importance. It was a time in which the world was dark but the soul was full of life, in which the grey walls of the cloister became the ideal of the believing attitude, and when ascetic monks in their rough habits crossed through the land, praising asceticism as the first Christian virtue.

Seen from this standpoint, it is understandable that an art that placed human *action* so much in the foreground –action its highest and purest form–opened the eyes to earthly life and its fascination, an earthly world that one had just closed off behind oneself behind heavy doors. Such an art could find no grace, and whenever men's spirit, which

⁷ Johann J. Wincklern: *Des heiligen Vaters Chrysostomi: Zeugnis der Wahrheit under die Schauspiele oder Komödien*, translated with commentary.

thirsted for beauty, required to be satisfied, they preferred to seek in solitude the contemplation of mystical poetry.

This is a phenomenon that has also revealed itself in other religions, for the Buddhist monks, who had torn the veil of *maya*, originally belonged to the fierce opponents of dramatic art in India.⁸

But it is now important to see how the current of sensory life then breaks through, despite declarations by [Church] Councils and pronouncements of anathema by the Pope. The human spirit could not exist merely by contemplation; instead humans postulated action and deeds, for life and for art. In the Church itself, an early fruit began to form, “the spiritual spectacle,” which although at first only timidly but gradually ever more strongly admitted the desire for viewing [*aanschouwen*]. Just as we saw in the case of the Greeks and other cultures, the first occasions were religious festivals. For the Greeks, it was at the festivals of Bacchus and Ceres, at the time of harvest of grapes and wheat. [170] In the case of the Church, there was a procession, a solemn pageant, in which the persons of the *Heiligen* [saints] were represented in a visible way to everyone. Such individual demonstrations soon grew to become the actions of a play. Up until then, drama had always been in service of paganism, and the church had been prejudiced against it. But now the Church, out of self-preservation, itself put drama forward as a way of creating new means of defence against the Church’s enemies. At the same time, this was an acknowledgement by the Church of the great importance of drama for the life of the people; unconsciously, the Church opened the way for theater as it exists today. For the Roman Church this was a *basiliskenei*⁹ [basilisk’s eye], for when the reformational movement began, the theater placed itself in its [the reformation’s]

⁸ JGF: This seems to contradict the earlier statement that Hindu drama relied on earlier Buddhist drama.

⁹ JGF: The basilisk was a mythic creature in Greek and Roman times; its characteristic was that it could kill by its gaze. *Basilisken-ei* is translated as ‘cockatrice’s eggs’ in Isaiah 59:5. In his *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche used the term to refer to how the “lie” or “egg” of a poet gave rise to something whose gaze would kill. See Wolfram Groddeck : *Friedrich Nietzsche: Dionysos-Dithyramben* (Berlin: Walter deGruyter, 1991), Vol. 2, 219 and footnotes.

service, and lashed out with unfamiliar sharpness against the spiritual disciples [monks]. But the reformers like Luther, Zwingli, Melancton and Calvin (in his first period) cheered on the spry actors, who often had to pay for their openhearted words with heavy punishments. Luther himself went so far as to publicly punish a friend who had expressed his disapproval of the performance of theatrical dramas. But soon the revolutionary current worked its way through, and the Reformed Church in its turn became the object of attacks, which attacks were not always unjustified. It then turned its back on the theater and its actors, and proclaimed a sentence of doom against it. I will certainly not assert that these personal grievances were the only reason for its revised attitude and that there was not also a moral degeneration in the modern theater. But it is irrefutable that the fear of criticism sharpened the tongues of preachers when, despite the Church's philippics, noble-minded men began to be attracted to the debased situation of the theater, which had been officially banned by the Church; according to their best convictions, they acted in ways that were obstacles in the path of the Hervormde Church.¹⁰

This was the back and forth game [*wisselspel*] from rejection to attraction and again rejection; but the concern of the Church was no longer pure. [171] It had always abandoned the old cloister morality; in the battle between *Weltverneinung* [world denial] and *Weltbejaung* [world affirmation], it had chosen the latter. From out of Geneva the inspiring words had come that one's entire life is required for Christ, and that the purification of rebirth wants to be expressed in every area.¹¹ It no longer desired the quiet separation to a contemplative spiritual life, but chose for its highest motto: "Pray and work." In short, it elevated the tortured dualism of matter and spirit into a higher unity¹² and it reconciled itself with earthly life. Why have Calvinists given so little application of

¹⁰ Compare this to the present battle of D. Coster and Vondel against the Hervormde preachers. See M.A. Perk: *De kerk en het tooneel*, pp. 20, 199.

¹¹ JGF: This is a very early affirmation by Dooyeweerd of neo-Calvinism's claim for every area of life. But note that it is only a contrast to a spiritualism of world-flight. It does not set out any idea of sphere sovereignty.

¹² JGF: This is a very early rejection of dualism of matter and spirit. This was not at all common at the time that Dooyeweerd wrote this article. Vollenhoven's doctoral dissertation, which would be completed in the next few years, continued to affirm such a dualism.

these glorious words of their great predecessor in the area [*gebied*] of art? Why do they still carry on the old sin of the Pharisees, declaring unclean those places to which God calls them? Is it blindness or powerlessness?

* * *

After this short historical sketch of the development of the nature of the theater and its relation to the Church, we now have to deal with the fierce-toothed [*felgetaande*] aesthetic objections, and I really feel like a knight from out of the old romantic realm of dreams, outfitted with sword and shield and setting off for dragons' lairs to fight with fire-breathing monsters.¹³ This is no self-exaltation, for I honestly acknowledge that at first I had very little courage, and I despaired of being able to convince my opponents with reasonable arguments. For excuse me, you either have a feeling for art or you don't. If you do, but still refuse for whatever reason to go to the theater, well then you can never expect from me that I can let you experience [*doorleven*] that which you avoid with all your senses. For the wonderful aesthetic emotion can certainly be experienced, but it can never be approached by reason.¹⁴ Every attempt to do so is itself prejudiced and is hopelessly ridiculous. Therefore those who do not refer to the theater as art and who never have visited a theater make themselves ludicrous. If they in fact went to the theater and came to the same conclusion, then I would not be able to speak with them; I direct my attention [172] only to the narrower group among my fellow believers, who see an actor's art as merely a second hand art or an art of secondary importance.¹⁵ That the idea of "art" is absolute and admits of no gradations has been argued well enough already, and I do not feel called to again explain this almost axiomatic assertion. We [are told by those

¹³ JGF: Dooyeweerd's romantic image of himself should be kept in mind as we read his later philosophy!

¹⁴ JGF: Dooyeweerd continued to emphasize experience as the basis for his philosophy. (J. Glenn Friesen: "95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd," *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009) 78-104, Thesis 1 and references, online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/95Theses.html>]).

¹⁵ This is an opinion that is especially prevalent in Germany.

who see drama as secondary] to take both expressions as identical¹⁶ and to choose the first expression [that of the author] as giving the intention more correctly. They intend by this that only the author of the play has received the vision at first hand, and that the interpreter on the other hand executes merely a mirror-image of the work—he serves as the medium between the creator and the public. Well now, the medium is unnecessary and can only hinder the pure conception of beauty by the public. The image is transparent and the reasoning entwined around is plausible in every respect. Those whose fantasy has been strongly enough developed can see the drama in a visionary way much sharper and more ideal than the actor can represent it; they have no need for a medium but can undergo the dramatic emotion in complete purity merely by reading it. Those who have lesser aesthetic aptitude—well now, it sounds rather patronizing—they can use the theater as a *pons asinorum*.¹⁷ If one takes this argument *au sérieux* [seriously], then we would have to regard it as the denial of the social aesthetic worth of the actor's art; it is superfluous for the higher developed person; for the lesser gifted it is a defective aid that can furthermore damage their aesthetic aptitude by its false attraction. If someone in a particular circle wants to practice the creation of a role, that may have individual value, but one should then avoid public displays. For [on this view], the dramatic actor does not produce anything, but performs only the service of mirroring. He may be an artist, but not a creative artist, he only gives “the impression of an impression” and what is surplus [to that reflection], which otherwise could do no harm, must be given up in view of the social dangers that it brings with it.

[173] But this argument, which at first glance appears to have some force, contradicts itself if we think about it logically. If we may for a moment use Aristotelian terminology: each artistic impression finds its stimulus directly or indirectly in the external world, in

¹⁶ JGF: Dooyeweerd means the expression by the author of the drama and the expression by the performer of the drama. Dooyeweerd does not accept that they are the same expression. In his later philosophy, he explained the difference as one of different enkaptic interlacements.

¹⁷ JGF: ‘*pons assinorum*’ means “bridge of asses.” It is used to refer to the first difficult proposition in Euclid. It is here used to refer to the theater audience in a demeaning sense: they are not capable of the pure aesthetic appreciation.

the not-I.¹⁸ Now if this not-I is matter, from which by the medium of the artistic soul the form as a work of art comes into existence, then the work of art as such is again the not-I, the matter out of which the author gives birth to his creation as form through the medium of his own soul. Here the chain of causation ceases: the public does not create;¹⁹ it is purely passive in undergoing the dramatic emotion. The impression that the *creation* makes upon the public does not lead again to independent reflection, but at the most to an expression of sympathy [*medegevoel*].

If we agree on this, then the actor on the stage is in his act of representation just as much a creative artist as the author, although the matter that he uses is different. The word ‘second hand’ is unjust, for the creation as such is just as original as the work of the author.²⁰ We are encouraged to be able to cite a powerful ally here, the philosopher Hegel. In his *Aesthetik* he says the following in reference to actors:



We now call actors ‘artists’ and we accord them the complete honour of an artistic profession: our present opinion is that being an actor gives rise to neither a moral nor a social stain. And correctly so, since this art demands much talent, understanding, perseverance, diligence, practice, knowledge, and at its high point even a richly talented genius. For the actor must not only penetrate deeply into the spirit of the author and of the role, and completely adapt his own individuality to it in both an inner and an external way, but he must also *with his own productivity fulfill many points, complete gaps [174] and discover transitions*; in short he must by his acting explain for us the author insofar as he makes visible all secret intentions and deeper lying masterstrokes of the author, bringing them to vivid immediateness.²¹ [my translation of Dooyeweerd’s translation into Dutch]

¹⁸ JGF: this concern of what is foreign or ‘*vreemd*’ to the I, continued to hinder the development of Dooyeweerd’s thought until he saw that none of the modes of consciousness is foreign to one’s selfhood. (Friesen: “95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd,” *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009) 78-104, Thesis 70 and references, online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/95Theses.html>]).

¹⁹ ‘Create’ is used here in the sense of representation or impersonation [*uitbeelden*] of a role.

²⁰ Compare the article of Thomson in *De Beukelaar*, referred to by Minderaa in his article “Het Tooneel,” *Fraternitas* I, 10, pp. 127-137 (October, 1914).

²¹ Hegel: *Aesthetik* III, 521 ff.

If the actor is a creative artist, it follows that the view is incorrect that his performance is superfluous, and that the *reading* of the work of art can already provide the full dramatic pleasure. Reading is something essentially different from seeing a performance of the drama; seeing a performance is an independent pleasure. The actor creates by gestures, attitude and intonation; he awakens new emotions in those who view him; his art is totally his own. By means of his own genius it is possible to move the audience, even where the work that he—I can now say “re-creates”—is the product of a third or fourth grade talent. I need only refer to the current popular dramas of Fabricius and van Riemsdijk, whom no one will read, but to the performance of whose works hundreds of people are drawn. If you still doubt me, then go admire L. Bouwmeester in his production of *The Merchant of Venice*, and allow the dark music and the dramatic representation—which Shakespeare could not have dictated to him—quiver through your soul. Then you may perhaps feel what you have missed by mere reading: the music of the drama!

Hegel argues for the essential importance of the performance. He says,

It may well be true that a dramatic product by its inner worth can already be poetically satisfying; but the performance first gives its inner dramatic meaning. [my translation of Dooyeweerd’s translation into Dutch]

He gives another objection to the existing German habit of merely reading a work. It is this, that the author himself intended his work only in part for “reading” and such mere reading forgets the dramatic truth and vividness [*levendigheid*] for which the theatrical performance is the true touchstone. [175] It cannot be replaced by any mere reading. Furthermore, reading a play is merely an unsatisfying intermediary between private interpretation, in which the real side totally falls away (and is left to fantasy), and the total performance.

Apart from Hegel we can also make a powerful appeal to the history of the development of drama. As we saw, the impulse for it always proceeded from the apparently ineradicable urge of the human mind to give his religious emotion a sensory form in movement and to illustrate the inner process of the soul. The fleeting, ineffable musical emotion [*ontroering*], the potential for all art, wanted as it were to express itself in the concrete forms of word, attitude and gesture, and when the completed drama like a pure

white goddess arose from out of it, music continued to drone softly after it, like the darkly dashing sea, whose snowy foam had given birth to it. No Greek would have thought of going to “read” the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. That would have been wholly at variance and contrary to their plastic spirit and against the tradition of their art. But when “spiritual spectacles” first arose, the Christian Church would also never have thought to place the dramas before the public merely for “reading.” There was no need for such a dramatic diversion [*ontspanning*], and the new means of battle would then have at once missed its goal.

According to this tortured view, musical drama, which Wagner created as an ideal masterpiece, would simply have to be thrown overboard, for whoever believes that simply by reading the text of “Parsival” one already is able to experience the complete pleasure that is given by a performance in Bayreuth understands almost nothing about this art.

And finally, the extent that the people, who in the end do not care at all about theory, feel the performance to be necessary, demonstrate that the overwhelming majority people are those who visit the theater compared to those individuals who in the loneliness of their study admire the beauty of the drama. And in any event, the first category [176] includes most artists; I for one would not willingly assert that this group is aesthetically lower than the individuals [who merely read].

* * *

We would like to say one more thing about the moral meaning of the theater arts and the dangers that it threatens. They are certainly not to be minimized, and he who wants to gloss over them is not looking properly at this issue of the theater. The frivolous life “*en air Bohémien*” [with a Bohemian atmosphere] that actors generally lead, which has brought a bad smell to the words ‘actor’ and ‘actress’ must over time affect like an infection the people that honour and shower praise on it. And even if this were not so, the existence of a morally inferior class, which would largely have to be replenished from among themselves, since the “fashionable citizen” would regard his children as too good to act on “the stage,” would decline more and more to what I have called the “charlatan type;” this would be a continuing accusation against a Christian society.

These are the usual objections that are used by this side, and I don't know much to say against them because I feel that they are well grounded. I only need to make a great reservation with respect to the alleged infecting character of theatrical actors. It is just their more or less isolated position that will appreciably minimize the danger. The people that stream together in the theater hall know the actor merely "in his role," as an actor, but not as a man. The issue of his humanity is not in issue, and it is a demonstrated psychological fact that the actor who had moved men to horror by portraying the character of a devil on stage, need only to go to those neighbourhoods which, evening after evening had sent their contingents to the "galleries," and he would be greeted with booing and garbage.

But the other objection is serious enough, the breakdown of the actors, and the forming of a lower ethical class, [177] which has taken place in the history of all lands, and appears to be an unavoidable pestilence. If we observe history, we see that both in pagan as well as Christian drama, degeneration first begins where the professional actor makes his entrance, where art becomes "breadwinning." As long as this has not taken place, the actor stands in high esteem; he is the teacher of the people, and his life is an example for the public, who may enjoy his art. This is the period in which the sound of religion still murmurs through theater as an inspiring mystery, and in which emancipation [from religion] has not yet taken place and the public with high feeling merges with the actors, where the bronze doors of drama are opened and "life" unleashes its dark depths. The artist then sets the tone, and the public did not desire sensation, for it understood that what was being offered to be seen was not merely "amusement" but spirit-purifying joy.

Now as soon as authorship becomes a "profession," the question of money wants to be heard, and it forces itself between art and artist. The performance no longer serves the perfection of the sense of beauty, but becomes speculation; the word is given to the public! And where those elements who hold the money purse are called up, the result can be seen in advance. Art is very beautiful, but it gives nothing in one's wallet. The instructions are therefore given: seek stimuli, as many as you can, work up the heart's passions, especially the lower passions, wave red cloths, make the crowd shake from fear or chuckle with delight, create sensation, ever more sensation!

Success is guaranteed: thundering applause and calls of ‘bravo’ await you and furthermore you make a nice profit.

We have seen that under these circumstances religion improperly withdrew, leaving the area “to evil.”

And the unavoidable interaction of the public with the actor distressingly increases this running wild, so that frequently [178] authorities have to come between them in order to control the debauchery.

That is what is so often referred to as ‘the industrialism of art,’ which was so fiercely opposed by Richard Wagner in Germany.

Let us now look at the present situation of the theater. If we look at the repertoire that is regularly offered to the public, and if we put aside certain infamous occasions, then we must say from an unprejudiced standpoint that there is not yet so much bad taste. It may be that no religious spirit rules the stage—how could we expect that when the Church does not raise a finger to restore the broken bond! Almost every evening one can enjoy healthy art without being disturbed by the murderous cries of stage heroes, or gruesome ghost appearances, and without the ear being bothered by dirty double *entendres*. Where nevertheless it sometimes happens, the newspaper critics are generally ready to offer a healing antidote and to admonish the public to let “discerning judgment” do its work. The shameless naturalism from France that spread its sultry pestilence for so long has given way to the fresher spirit of realism.²² The names of Ibsen, Shaw, Hauptman and Suderman, Heyermans and others are already drawing the crowds. Decorative arts are becoming refined, and the directors of the theater have artists in their midst. This pushing back of the brute power of money and of the eternal desire for sensation is not due to our influence, certainly not, for we have done nothing other than to turn away and to damn.

The countercurrent has come from powerful, aesthetic intellects from other quarters, who no longer wanted to put their gifts in service of the first and best fat-bellied man of means [*rentenier*], who after a heavy meal at noon wants a diversion [179] that does not require

²² One should look at the brilliant plea for the realistic direction by Wilhelm Fischer: *Die “Moderne,”* (Wiesbaden: Jurany und Hensels Nachfolger).

any effort. These others have dared to join in the [aesthetic] battle with the beggarly proletarian²³ souls in the theater pit and the gallery, who thirst to again put forward their personalities in a place where for a long time only the impersonal seemed to rule.

But whoever is not prejudiced will also see that such victory, which has certainly not been obtained on all points, can be only temporary. For the fault lies in the industrial system, which prostitutes the actor's art, and threatens at every moment to give dominance to bad taste and the desire for excitement.

The voices that have been raised, also among us, asking the authorities to give leadership, are frustrated by aesthetic objections, because the state simply cannot be a judge of art; the plan of Martin Kalfi²⁴ to give the management as much as possible to real artists, and then to make a subsidy available from the state, allows the basic error to continue to exist, and leaves too much to the chance of each passing moment.

We see only one way out that promises real improvement: to break with the whole system, which places the emphasis on the money-purse. And because this will not be possible if one allows the system of professional actors to stay intact, this means that such a system must also be radically set aside.

And now perhaps the Church can make good what it for too long has neglected. Seeing the turning of the tide, it should stretch out the hand of reconciliation to the theater, which the Church itself created; it needs to put aside its blind prejudices and to pay its old debt to this wandering pariah.

²³ JGF: Not necessarily a Marxist view; Baader used the term 'proletarian' long before Marx. In his 1835 article on the 'Proletariatsproblem' Baader pleads for justice on behalf of the exploited 'proletariat.' Christian love forbids economic exploitation of the weak. Baader proposes the representation of the working classes in the legislature. He also expresses concern about the exploitation of wage earners by business, and he advocates trade unions. The priests should care for the poor classes. Betanzos sees this as anticipating the later idea of 'worker-priests.' Betanzos points out that Baader's Christian-social ideas predate the social analysis of Karl Marx, although different solutions are suggested. See Ramón Betanzos, *Franz von Baader's Philosophy of Love*, ed. Martin M. Herman (Passagen Verlag, 1998), 76.

²⁴ See his brochure: "Een Woord over het tooneel."

We can set up throughout the land a powerfully organized society of talented young people—why should they also not be found among us? And we should seek to unite individual actors who are universally admired and capable, to become leaders of this organization. There should above all be no confessional boundaries; if we want to exert any influence, such boundaries are impossible in this area.²⁵

²⁵ JGF: Even in his mature thought, Dooyeweerd did not support the “*zeilen*” in the Netherlands. He did not regard that as an example of sphere sovereignty. In a passage that for some reason is omitted from the (partial) English translation, *Roots of Western Culture* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), Dooyeweerd seems to criticize any view of the religious antithesis in terms of the idea of pluriform democracy (or *verzuiling*), in conflict with the views expressed at p. ix of the Preface by the translator, John Kraay. In my view, Kraay confuses sphere sovereignty and political pluralism. At p. 49 of *Roots*, after the sentence on line 2 [“If one takes sphere sovereignty as no more than a historical given, somehow grown on Dutch soil as an expression of Holland's love of freedom, then one automatically detaches it from the constant, inner nature of the societal sphere.”], Kraay omits the following long passage from pages 47-48 of *Vernieuwing*, where Dooyeweerd is critical of certain developments:

Daaronder verstaat men dan, dat alle andere levenskringen zich als zelfstandige delen in het staatsgeheel moeten incorporeren met behoud van een zekere autonomie. De staatstaak zou zich dan op deze wijze laten decentraliseren, door naast gemeenten, provincies en waterschappen, “nieuwe organen” te scheppen, bekleed met een publiekrechtelijke regelingsbevoegdheid onder oppertoezicht van de overheid. Zo zouden dan de centrale organen van wetgeving en bestuur van een belangrijk deel van hun taak worden ontlast. Dan zouden inderdaad socialist, Rooms-katholiek en anti-revolutionair zich in ditzelfde principe van staatsontlasting kunnen vinden. De “sovereiniteit in eigen kring” zou dan met iedere nieuw historisch-politische situatie een andere zin aannemen.

Hoe komt het, dat het met de fundamentele misvatting van dit principe zover kon komen? Daarover de volgende paragraaf.

[They then understand [sphere sovereignty] in the sense that all other spheres of life must be incorporated as independent parts of the state as a whole, but each retaining a certain autonomy. The task of the state could in this way allow itself to be decentralized, by creating “new organs” in addition to municipalities, provinces and water-board jurisdictions, invested with the ability to govern themselves by public law, under the supervision of the government. In this way the central organs would be relieved of an important part of their task of law-giving and government. Then socialist, Roman Catholic and Anti-Revolutionary [groups] would

[180] I hope such an organization may be established among Roman-Catholics, and that the performances given by them would obtain the approval of qualified judges. Is linking up in a kind of melting pot really impossible?

The cause for which we plead is of great importance. Schiller called the theater a “Moralische Anstalt” [moral institution], and whoever denies its powerful influence in the moral area that proceeds from it has simply closed his eyes to this fact. Theater is something the people need; that idea alone must drive us to action, instead of always being busy quoting citations from texts in order to show why it should not occur.

One may respond that such performances will not draw a public, and that competition with the ruling system will not be able to be maintained! I believe that such impotent statements will be met by the establishment of our Oratorio Society, and whoever sees the packed concert halls at its performances and who is able to hear what Schoonderbeek has been able to do with his choirs, will not dare to maintain this opinion!

On the other hand I see us venturing out to dragon’s lairs, but now with pickaxes and flaming torches. The fire-breathing monsters are still there—the romantic side of the fight draws us on—they are the old, unshakable prejudices! The battle is on all sides, but already our dull blows sound continuously and we are resolute!

Two powers strengthen us: enthusiasm and faith!

Amsterdam, February 11, 1916.

H. Dooyeweerd

indeed find themselves within this same principle of relieving the burden of the state. So in each new historical-political situation, “sovereignty in its own sphere” would then be able to take on another meaning.

How was it able to come so far that this principle [of sphere sovereignty] could be misunderstood in such a fundamental way? I will deal with this in the following paragraph.]