

***Japan Academy Prize to:***

Yosuke MORIMOTO  
Professor, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences,  
The University of Tokyo



for *La légalité de l'art. La question du théâtre au miroir de la casuistique*

***Outline of the work:***

In contemporary Western society, art is respected as a vital component of cultural activity, and its value, supported by the principle of freedom of expression, is rarely challenged. However, in both pre-modern philosophy and Christian tradition, art —theatrical art in particular— tended to be viewed with suspicion and prejudice. How has then Western culture come to form a system in which art is assumed to be an object worthy of appreciation and respect? What comes immediately to mind as significant moments for its progression are the two major events in the later modern period: the establishment of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline in the mid-18th century and the subsequent emergence of “art” in its modern sense (*art* in French and *Kunst* in German). But what could be the case for the previous periods?

At the point of departure comes Pierre Nicole (1625–1695), a vigorous critic of theatre. Having shown that those defenders of theatre who were a target of Nicole’s criticism were actually the “lax casuists” attacked by Pascal in the *Provincial Letters*, Dr. Yosuke Morimoto, in his book *La légalité de l'art. La question du théâtre au miroir de la casuistique* (*The Legality of Art: The Question of Theater as Reflected in Casuistry*) [Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2020], proceeds to elucidate the rationale by which the lax or permissive casuistry is to be tolerated as theatrical art in the so-called “court of conscience,” analyzing its typical cases and their ways of solution. Such approach is dictated by the fact that casuistry as an entity is tantamount to a traditional collection of case studies, which include such a variety of institutional and disciplinary systems as ethical theology, scholastic theology, patristic theology, canon law and Roman law, as well as ancient (especially Aristotelian) philosophy.

In explicating the case of permissive casuistry, an emphasis is placed, for various reasons, on its theatrical relevance: an attention is drawn, for instance, to the actor’s amoral interiority on the analogy of a “*faux dormeur hérétique*” (a sham sleeper speaking heretic words), who cannot be deemed as an “external heretic.” In a similar vein, an investigation is made into the social acceptability of theatrical performance by reviewing a number of theological texts, like Lombard’s *Sentences* and Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, together with

their late-scholastic commentaries, with the result that the gradual acceptance of actors' social status was seen to be realized despite the various repressive legal provisions that went against it.

After a brief discussion on the views of rigorist casuists, who ignored the distinction made by permissive casuists between actors and characters, and hence tended to exclude the very concept of fiction from theatrical art, the author goes on to examine two of the most important changes in the development of tolerant view of theatrical performance. Firstly, the expansion in scope of the tolerable theatre. It includes not only the kinds of play that are worthy of approval but all kinds of play, regardless of their ethical and aesthetic value. Secondly, the emergence of a bold view that any play that will bring pleasure to the audience is entitled to legitimation. Efforts were subsequently made in search of its theoretical justification beginning around the end of the 15th century. It happened that key to its theoretical innovation was found in the concept of *delectatio morosa* (retarded-thought-delight), i.e., a kind of pleasure arising from thought per se, which is clear of any referent or object. This concept of pleasure, having its origin in patristic theology, the author observes, helped to prompt casuistry to form its own concept of pleasure — a particular kind of pleasure essentially enjoyed not from what is represented on stage but through an instance of representation per se. Through a detailed analysis of a typical case presented by the Spanish theologian Pedro Lorca (1561–1621), Dr. Morimoto illustrates the emergence of this concept, making an ingenious use of the late medieval scholastic exegeses on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Briefly put, while Aristotle found pleasure in the *mimêsis*, Aquinas and his successors, under the influence of Averroes's interpretation of Aristotle, came to take the idea of *mimêsis* as a matter of representation (*repraesentatio*). This paved the way to the idea that the pleasure of representation experienced by the theater audience can be dealt with as separate from its content or referent.

The present study is truly original in that it grapples with the fundamental question of meaning and value of theatrical art for Western culture and society. It is also remarkable that it does so by drawing attention to the importance of casuistry, which modern scholarship has long since put in disrespect or even oblivion. With primary sources at its disposal, it has cultivated an area that traditional Western humanities and social sciences have hardly covered.