

PART III

ART, MORALITY,  
AND THE POLIS

# *Dangerous Music*

Wayne H. Harter

The ancient maxim concerning human excellence is *one man, one pursuit*. "Each one must practice one of the functions in the city, that for which his nature made him naturally most fit. And . . . justice is the minding of one's own business and not being a busybody. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Nowhere is the wisdom of this rule more evident than in attempts by philosophers (as philosophers) to judge the artistic merits of art or, likewise, in attempts by artists (as artists) to defend their work according to philosophical principles. For, the virtue of speculative knowing is not convertible with the virtue of making good things; the very temperaments proper to each are at odds; so much so, that one may say that the pursuit of the one excellence tends to make one unfit for the other. Unfortunately, this division of labor and all it implies makes little impression upon the imprudent. Unlike the admirable philosopher, Jacques Maritain, who once admitted, "I do not believe that a philosopher would dare speak of poetry if he could not rely on the direct experience of a poet," <sup>2</sup> less humble souls rush to cash in their particular expertise for license to stray into realms of which they have not even the vaguest grasp of the landmarks.

Witness the case of more than ten years ago, when Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* <sup>3</sup> attempted to apply principles of classical political philosophy to the question of rock music. The superficiality of his analysis is all too apparent even to those who are its ostensible concern, today's youth. Despite, thanks to a typically abysmal education, their inability to grasp his argument at the level of political principles, they never-

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Republic* IV.433a, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. Bollingen Series 35.1 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. xxx.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

theless are able to see the excessiveness of sweeping generalizations such as "rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire—not love, not *eros*, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored."<sup>4</sup> They themselves would never take it into their heads to defend "rock music" as a whole, a term they know is incredibly vague and covering an immense amount of musical territory. So nor can they take seriously any attempt by Bloom or others to discredit it.

It is too bad they are not equally reticent, again thanks to their education, to accept as wise the response to Bloom offered by the late musician Frank Zappa.<sup>5</sup> In essence, and in his own words, Zappa's musical criticism states the "*Ultimate Rule* ought to be: 'If it sounds good to you, it's bitchen; and if it sounds bad to you, it's shitty.'"<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, only a less elevated formulation of that tired relativism wherein everything (except those matters which inconvenience the holder) is simply a matter of shifting perspective (and therefore none of your damn business). But for those not inclined to musical solipsism, Zappa's rule appears as nothing more than aesthetic vulgarity.

In fact it is doubtful that Zappa, who is an accomplished musician, actually intended the statement in the witlessness it seems to convey. It is also possible that Bloom, had he been familiar with the work of Zappa and certain others, would not have written his chapter on music—at least not in the extreme form that it took. But in any event, the purpose of this writing is neither to defend Zappa as a thinker nor Bloom as a music critic. It is, rather, first to argue support for the work of these two men, at least in the respective realms to which they have legitimate claims; and secondly, to then ask what ought to be done when one accepts in principle the right of political censorship of the arts, but realizes that such practice is likely to target some very good, if questionable, works.

In order to achieve our goal what is needed is a hybrid wisdom, "the confluence of two independent streams of intellect, that of the philosopher and the artist."<sup>7</sup> This is not to say we must have in the concrete sense "a Socrates who plays the flute," or forego the ancient maxim on justice. Musical virtue is not to be confused with the ability to play an instrument; the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Zappa, "On Junk Food for the Soul. In Defense of Rock and Roll," *New Progressive Quarterly* 4 (Winter 1988), pp. 26–29.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Zappa with Peter Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1989), p. 188, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> John A. Oesterle, "Towards a Critique of Music," *The Thomist* 14 (1951), pp. 323–34.

musician in the proper sense of the term is the composer, not those who subsequently perform the work. As Maritain argued, "The oral or instrumental expression, which in the fluid successions of resonant matter transmits compositions thus completed in the spirit, is an extrinsic consequence and a simple means for such arts, and nothing more."<sup>8</sup> The virtue of art is an *intellectual* virtue, rooted in the ability to perceive intelligible relations between, in this case, sound and the good of the soul. And while, strictly speaking, the art of music refers to the rendering of such relations in concrete objects, and not to the cognitive basis for that work, still the excellence of a work of art as work of art can be discerned by one who sees *ex post facto* the intelligible relations between the structure of the work and the end it serves.

The pressing character for now finding such hybrid wisdom comes largely from the marketing success of the contemporary music industry. Although music has always had a place in human societies, the relative size of that place has certainly varied and it would be incredible to argue that any previous society could match the sheer quantitative presence of music in our own. An obvious indication of this new status for music comes from the hitherto unimaginable proliferation of retail markets and communication networks dedicated to its "consumption." Just thirty years ago the normal place to find music recordings—that is outside of radio—was in the relatively rare "music store" dealing in everything from accordions to private lessons. Today, on the other hand, every suburban mall has at least one and sometimes two retail outlets feeding the sustained demand for more and more music. And outside these rather expensive venues the expanding market has led to the advent of musical "superstores," as well as to mail-order houses (now conveniently accessed through the world-wide internet)—all of which are dominated overwhelmingly by what some would see as various categories of suspect music. Therefore, whatever inherent power for good or bad is possessed by music in its relation to the soul, such power has been increased, if not in direct proportion to, at least significantly by its cultural ubiquity. Even primary school children, wired into the musical video channels, have become mysteriously immersed in the fashionable world of pop music and delight in playground debates over the proper content of the category of "cool."

The problem is that music is potentially dangerous. About 2500 years ago the Greek philosophers discerned the important role of music for the

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Art an Intellectual Virtue," in *Art and Scholasticism* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1947), p. 17.

education of youth.<sup>9</sup> Youth, they argued, must come to feel happiness in those things a virtuous person finds happiness in, and pain in those things that to the latter bring pain. With the exception, however, of those rare souls who by nature are inclined toward the noble life, most children are driven by their desire for sensual gratification toward an adult life that will be a source of suffering not only to themselves but to the polity as well. What then must we do? We must lead them, the philosophers answered, by the only road they will accept, the road of sensual pleasure; but instead, thereby we must lead them toward a life of noble leisure and political virtue.

Enter the role of music. Pleasant melodies and rhythms act as vehicles for seducing youth into those principles necessary for the common good. Much more attractive are the difficult virtues of courage, temperance, and justice when presented in beautiful songs of heroes and famous citizens. Even the naturally disordered souls of children resonate to the good of difficult character, when the latter is presented within the seductive pleasures of tonality and measure.

Powerful tools, of course, always possess an ambiguous relation to the good. Thus the most effective tool for the education of youth, music, can be used as well as the instrument of their destruction. Through musical inculturation youth can become attuned to disorder and unbridled passions just as easily—perhaps more easily given their native bent—as they can to the tunes of moral virtue. Consequently, in jealousy for the souls of the city's youth, Socrates admonishes the good legislator to impose regulations upon musicians, forbidding the performing of dangerous music. They must avoid producing art in which the ignoble is portrayed in a good or pleasing light; they must avoid the sorts of sensual rhythms subversive of virtue; and they must accept the guidance of the legislator (who is the person rightly concerned with the common good) on this point or face banishment—or worse.

Lest in our modern prejudices we jump to the hasty opinion that the devious Socrates and his philosophical cronies advocated an early form of mind-control, aimed at sacrificing the freedom and happiness of the individual in deference to the interests of an ordered but joyless society, it is important to keep in mind that they were convinced (and it is impossible to imagine any educator not likewise convinced) that there is a *particular kind* of life deserving of the name "the good life." What Socrates was interested in, in the case of youth, was not indoctrinating them so as to render them incapable of choosing the good life, but rather in directing their passions so

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* VIII; Plato, *Republic* III.395–417b.

that when they attained the age whereat they might choose that life in freedom and in truth, they would not be hindered by disorder in their loves and hates. Given that human passions tend not to be in harmony with right reason and that reason right or wrong nonetheless must direct the passions in their blind search for happiness, and given that reason seldom attains any degree of rectitude without extensive training, then it becomes impossible to argue against the necessity for censorship in the education of youth.

Any society, but especially a democratic society, depends upon the education of its citizens. If they are the products of a misspent youth, degraded in their likes and dislikes by the seductive powers of decadent music, what hope can be held out against the demise of political life? And furthermore, given that there are philosophical and historical reasons for thinking that a democracy when it degenerates is liable to find itself metamorphosed into a tyranny, who can gainsay the seriousness of this consideration?<sup>10</sup> A healthy democracy is not one that can afford the luxury of decadent music. Quite the opposite.

Armed with this classical understanding of the role of music in the education of youth for the common good Allan Bloom waded into the ongoing fight against rock'n'roll, although his professed primary concern in *The Closing of the American Mind* "is not with the moral effects of this music—whether it leads to sex, violence or drugs. [His] issue," rather, "is its effect on education, and [how] it ruins the imagination of young people and makes it very difficult to have a passionate relationship to the art and thought that are the substance of liberal education."<sup>11</sup>

In short, the problem with rock music in Bloom's estimation is that it fails miserably in the educative function. Not only does it not express the highest reaches of human excellence, instead it panders to the crude, infantile passions of pubescent youth. It offers up to them as a good, even the greatest good, the immediate gratification of their vulgar, unswerving desires. "Rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire—not love, not *eros*, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored." Rock music aims at the pleasures proper to barbaric youth, and contains "nothing noble, sublime, profound, delicate, tasteful or even decent" in its repertoire. "There is room only for the intense, changing, crude and immediate." Rather than offer a vision of what they could and ought to be, rock music confirms youth in their feckless pleasures. It is a sad irony, thinks

<sup>10</sup> For a philosophical consideration of the causes of change of government see Aristotle, *Politics* V.

<sup>11</sup> Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 79.

Bloom, that one of the greatest achievements in the history of political life has culminated in the person of a thirteen-year-old sitting rapt before MTV, a

pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy.<sup>12</sup>

Rock music offers nothing transcendent to the savage soul of this developing youth. It thereby also corrupts his cultivation in that higher life which is his birthright.

Nothing here will be gainsaid of Bloom's estimation of songs straightforwardly glorifying parricide and self-abuse. If such melodic tributes truly exist, they certainly are degraded forms of human expression originating in disordered souls and appealing only to the most vicious or puerile, that is to say, to those in need of extensive therapy and/or prolonged incarceration. Nor will "rock music" find its defense here; the category is about as wide and therefore useless as is "religion." Most of what passes under its banner is certainly trite, crude, and thus unrelievedly boring, and it would be a great service if it were to disappear immediately from the already cluttered airwaves. But on that score it is not only rock music that is dangerous. Tasteless and cheaply manufactured goods, network television, much of what passes for primary education and almost all of what passes for higher education, not to mention insipid Sunday liturgies: these things are threatening to destroy our spirits with their noise, garishness, their bland and unmitigated stupidity. But that, of course, is a somewhat larger topic than the subject of this writing.

Returning to the more modest matter at hand, we can pass over quickly what Frank Zappa has to say in defense of his art. It is hard to take seriously Zappa's refutation of Bloom's claim—Bloom's claim that, unlike rock music, the music of Bach and Beethoven represents the product of an artistic unity born from a cultivation of the soul. It is hard to take seriously Zappa's counterclaim that sometime in the distant future similar estimations will be made of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album; that the classics are no more than the surviving "hits" from an era wherein popes and kings, instead of music moguls, chose what would survive; that, in matters of aesthetics, the primary rule is personal taste. In fact, outside of some pointed references to the market forces behind the current level of popular music,

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

the overall impression Zappa attempts to give of his art—of all art—is that it has no relation to any elevation or lowering of the soul. It is merely a pleasant pastime, more satisfying at least to himself than beer and television, but even then appealing only to his sense of gentle amusement:

Beer and television bore me, so what am I going to do? I am going to be alive for X number of years. I have to do something with my time besides sleep and eat. So, I devise little things to amuse myself. If I can amuse somebody else, great. And if I can amuse somebody else and earn a living while doing it, that is a true miracle in the twentieth century!<sup>13</sup>

In fairness, it is necessary to note that one should seldom presume Mr. Zappa to be speaking in all seriousness. But even if this were the rare occasion, we are not, as already admitted, interested in defending his stature as a critic. Artistic genius and political wisdom seldom cohabit in one soul. Still, despite the nonsense Zappa is prone to utter, he provides us the perfect foil for Bloom, and this for two closely connected reasons. First, if in debate Zappa were to refrain from addressing Bloom on philosophical grounds and simply play his music, then Bloom would stand confounded (at least in his sweeping generalizations). But secondly, it is certainly questionable whether Bloom in that scenario would have ears to hear the goodness of Zappa's artistry, and thus it points in any case to the limits of the philosopher to discern the good in matters of the fine arts.

Beginning with the first point, the claim that Zappa's music is a refutation of the charge that all rock music appeals to degenerate tastes must seem strange to many who are only passingly familiar with his work. Certainly two fellow travelers of Bloom, both of whom exhibit much more familiarity with contemporary music than does Bloom himself, agree on at least one thing. Frank Zappa's music, despite whatever technical merits it possesses, is a prime example of what is wrong with contemporary culture. Robert Pattison, in *The Triumph of Vulgarly*,<sup>14</sup> and Martha Bayles, in *Hole in Our Soul*,<sup>15</sup> characterize Zappa's music as tasteless and perverse. But with them as well we might refer to the second point: only those with ears for certain forms of music can hear that music. The giveaway, particularly with Pattison, is these critics' reliance upon lyrics (or titles) to analyze a song. And certainly, if one restricts the analysis of Zappa's music to the

<sup>13</sup> Zappa, "On Junk Food for the Soul," p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarly: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Martha Bayles, *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).



recitation of lyrics, it would be impossible in particular compositions to defend him against the charge of mindless vulgarity. For example, in the chorus to the song "Broken Hearts," on an album<sup>16</sup> that, incidentally, also contains the subject of protest to the Federal Communications Commission by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League, the listener is treated to a musical rendition of forced sodomy.

But unless one thinks that certain words or references to particular subjects is in itself decadent, it hardly makes sense to pass judgement upon "Broken Hearts" on this basis alone. Zappa, among other things, is a great satirist. Only humorless adults and the hopelessly puerile (and to the consideration of this latter class we must return) would assume that he is offering a straightforward encomium to rape. The lyrics, just like the words of a Swift or Voltaire, are intended to be humorous and operative on two distinct levels. Unlike such literary examples, however, Zappa's lyrics cannot be understood apart from the musical context they serve. Anyone posing as a music critic should have known this. Final judgement of the artistic and ethical merits of a work have to account for the conjunction of all elements present.

An essay, for obvious reasons, cannot demonstrate the very point upon which the truth of the present argument devolves. It must be satisfied with entertaining abstract possibilities. Therefore consider this. Simply in terms of artistic excellence, it is generally recognized by those who are familiar with his music, including those whose interests lie predominantly in "serious" music, that Frank Zappa is an accomplished composer. If it lends credence to this claim, then let it be added that among an impressive, lengthy list of achievements Zappa has been commissioned to conduct his orchestral works by numerous orchestras including the Residentie Orchestra (the Hague) and the Oslo Philharmonic; he has recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra, collaborated with Pierre Boulez on "Perfect Stranger," and was appointed special ambassador to the West on trade, culture, and tourism by Václav Havel, the President of Czechoslovakia. This author would argue that these facts alone prove very little, but very little is required here. All that must be admitted is that they indicate the *probable* merits of Zappa's "Broken Hearts." For, despite the all-too-real unevenness in the work of even the greatest of artists, such unevenness remains within elevated parameters. The recognition of excellence in the above mentioned endeavors thus gives basis for the supposition of excellence in Zappa's work in rock music.

<sup>16</sup> *Sheik Yerbouti* (Barking Pumpkin Records, 1990).

We therefore are left with the problem of reconciling compositional excellence with questionable lyrics. As a beginning, I think it is obvious that any attempt to see them, as some do, as forgivable distractions from otherwise well-crafted scores, caused by concessions to capitalist production in a vulgar market, would be in effect to abandon the defense of these works. It is not the business of the critic to pardon the artist from no doubt formidable forces aimed at diverting his art into more profitable avenues. It is certainly understandable when the merely human composer capitulates to market forces in the interests of eating and sleeping indoors and one must hope that such surrender finds mercy in the next life, but still the result is always a flawed work. So too any quirky impulses on the part of Zappa to add gratuitous "humor" must be judged as destructive of the artistic unity of the work—presuming, that is, that no greater unity was achieved by a resolution of disunity at a higher level. Only if the vulgar lyrics can be defended as an integral part of a beautiful whole would it be possible to spare "Broken Hearts" from the charge of defectiveness.

In fact, it is precisely in the dissonance created between the subject of the lyrics to this song and their musical treatment that makes the work not only artistically excellent, but highly moral and therefore, for reasons to be taken up shortly, important for consideration in the task of educating youth. Zappa's "Broken Hearts" has its most profound appeal to the sense of abstract pattern; it is music pleasing to the intellect in its delight of form, and what one cannot know from a simple reading of the lyrics is that the chorus "I'm gonna ram it, ram it, ram it, etc." comes packaged in a tightly harmonized vocal staccato. These lyrics, in relation to the form of their presentation, provide the song with an element of dissonance. They are a concrete reference to the vulgarity of contemporary life that constantly threatens to overcome beauty and from which music seeks to liberate us. In other words, these lyrics contrast to and thereby accentuate the elevating force of Zappa's music. They heighten our appreciation for how important and at the same time precarious is the place of music and all art in the modern world. They are vulgar because they signify the vulgar. But when heard within the context of Zappa's beautiful music, they are transformed through tonal and rhythmic exaggeration into sounds no longer commensurate with their everyday meaning; their vulgarity becomes defused. In consequence, they and the world they signify are rendered ridiculous, of value only insofar as they provide matter for the musical score. They take on a character subversive to their normal meanings, they become moralized in the same way that Swift's suggestion of serving up Irish children on the table of English gentleness is subversive to the contemporary meaning of the "Irish

problem." Who can take seriously that familiar world wherein ramming it up another's "poop chute" is precisely what those words convey, once they have heard the same transformed by the most exacting of harmony and rhythm and humor?

Is it possible, then, to reverse the judgement of Bloom on "rock"? At least in Zappa's "Broken Hearts," do we have a clear example of music that, which for obvious reasons would appeal to a disordered youthful sensuality, would work to elevate the listener beyond his leering aesthetic ignorance and towards an appreciation of the good of virtue? Again, no essay could hope to establish this particular point. But consider for the sake of argument that such is the case. Even then, this alone would not allow us to conclude the question of whether "Broken Hearts" is a valuable tool for the education of the virtuous society or whether it ought to be suppressed, at least in regard to youth. Just because the ideal listener would discover a moral ally in Mr. Zappa, there is little reason to believe that outside of carefully directed instruction the typical thirteen-year-old of Professor Bloom's nightmare would be that listener. Indeed, we have Zappa's own testimony on this point. According to the lyrics of another song,<sup>17</sup> the fact that his work is musically accomplished is totally irrelevant to his listeners, because they like it only for one reason, because it's "stupid."

So, what comes now? Ought we to press for governmental censorship, as is periodically suggested by political interest groups, in concern for the sensibilities of the chronologically and constitutionally incapable?

Ultimately, the correct answer to this question lies in the realm of political prudence, not in the simple consideration of abstract principles. And governing all such decisions must be the realization that freedom is rightfully curtailed, both within education and without, only in the interests of greater freedom.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, by virtue of the interdependence of all civic good, it must always be kept in mind that the sacrifice of one good is liable to impact in ways completely unforeseen in the good of related matters. One has only to think of Prohibition legislation to recognize this truth. "Because social freedoms interlock so tightly, it is not possible to know antecedently what the multiple effects of a regulation will be. At best, the effect you want can only be foreseen with probability, not certainty. And unforeseen effects may follow, with the result that a regulation, in itself

<sup>17</sup> "A Little Green Rosetta," from the *Joe's Garage* album (Barking Pumpkin Records, 1979, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. John Courtney Murray, S. J., "Should There be a Law?: The Question of Censorship," in *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), pp. 155-74.

sensible, may in the end do more harm than good.”<sup>19</sup> But even while keeping these guidelines for prudent governing in mind, we nevertheless must push on; for what matter is of greater concern than the formation of youth? “No *politician* should dare meddle with the laws of beauty,” warns Maritain, “but [the fine arts] still remain, by their generic nature, arts, ‘practical sciences,’ and on that score all the intellectual and moral values the work absorbs normally come under the control of whoever has the duty of taking care of the common good of human life.”<sup>20</sup> The correct policy here certainly depends upon political prudence. But prudence that is truly prudent is ruled by reason, not fortune; so we must seek to establish guiding principles.

First, one might invoke the principle that “in a discussion of moral actions, although general statements have a wider range of application, statements on particular points have more truth in them.”<sup>21</sup> We could thereby sidestep the question of government intervention by appealing to the rightful claim that only one familiar with the particular needs of a person’s education is in an adequate position to judge what material would benefit or harm him or her. Following upon the principle of subsidiarity, censorship thus would rightfully belong in the first instance to parents, and secondly to educators commissioned by them. In a society of virtuous citizens/educators, this would be not only the easy and most prudent solution, but the just decision as well.

Yes, in virtuous societies legislative decisions are easy to make, and even largely unnecessary. But given the current state of cultural affairs, is there any reason to suspect we live in such a society? Zappa’s music delights in parodying the overwhelming stupidity of contemporary culture. It therefore seems right to argue that it is impossible to proceed simply upon the principle of what is right for a right society. When citizens have abdicated or are no longer capable of discerning and regulating moral influences in the education of youth, the principle of subsidiarity no longer can be invoked and it becomes right for government to intervene.

The hitch, of course, is that those then called upon to legislate these matters are generally, as we see in the example of Bloom himself, in no position to discern well in matters of artistic excellence. Consequently, in resorting to governmental censorship many works of merit and even great

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Maritain, “Art and Morality,” in *Art and Scholasticism*, n. 139.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.7.1107a30, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962).

merit would be mistakenly censored and the cultural deposit proportionately impoverished. The seasonal efforts of civic-minded groups to ban reading of *Huckleberry Finn* in public schools is a case in point.

But it is important to keep in mind a causal relation set forward by the Greek philosophers. The life of virtue, including the ability to discern the good in matters of art, is secondary to a good character. In other words, whereas one can learn something *about* musical composition or market analysis and be at the same time a complete scoundrel, one cannot learn good government or how one ought to *apply* composition or market analysis without having first become good. One cannot learn what works of art are products of an elevated vision until one has learned to see from a height somewhere above the level of a barnyard animal. One thus could argue that the very attempt to regulate the moral climate for youth, even when undertaken by those whose sole credentials often are nothing more than good will united to the recognition of contemporary decadence, is a necessary first step away from the current state of affairs.

More importantly we must keep in mind the duty, the nobility of the lawmaker in relation to the common good. Political duty, especially as it is expressed in a modern democracy, lies heavily upon us, for it is weighed down by its order to the common good manifested in the most common life, in the life of those without adequate leisure or adequate education, of those who, living in a society driven by the incessant desire for matter, also have become insulated, in the interests of economics, from any profound critique of their passions. When the artist rightfully claims a certain moral autonomy in the line of his art, he has no such claim upon the life of man. Art, aiming at Beauty is speculative in character, and is, as Maritain reminds us, "metaphysically superior to Prudence." However, in relation to our final end, to our perfection as men and women, prudence is superior to art.

In the sometimes ensuing struggle between the good of the artist and the good of the prudent man, it is, as Maritain observes, difficult for the merely prudent man even to understand the artist:

In finding fault with a work of art, the Prudent Man, firmly established upon his moral virtue, has the certitude that he is defending against the Artist a sacred good, the good of Man, and he looks upon the Artist as a child or a madman.<sup>22</sup>

In his relation to the artist the lawmaker is bound to sometimes fail in preserving the legitimate good of the artist, and thereby in a certain sense he is to be counted *imprudent* through lack of wisdom. But even so, he does not

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Art and Morality," in *Art and Scholasticism*, pp. 65–66.

fail by cause of his legislating. Indeed, to abdicate his responsibility by reason of some incapacity to judge adequately the value of art, would be a far greater failure in prudence. For, the right to legislate belongs to no other and the subject of education is not of slight importance, and the signs of contemporary education failing our youth are too patent to ignore. The practical man has not always the luxury of waiting upon wisdom; he must act; he must act now, and he must act by what lights he possesses.

One should never demand more certainty in inquiry than is warranted by the subject. Considering all the relevant factors any answer to the question at hand therefore will be probable at best. Nevertheless, the present writer concludes thus. There is no reason to characterize the music of certain contemporary artists as anything other than a delight to the senses of the virtuous person habituated to the modes of their composition. There is, however, no reason to suspect that said person exists in great numbers, certainly not among youths themselves, and not among those guiding the education of youth. There is, on the other hand, much reason to think that "dangerous music" will be misperceived by those most likely to be enticed by it. There is, in conclusion, sufficient reason to warrant its censoring. The damnable business of this is that such censoring could only be undertaken by those folk, the civic leaders, whose credentials are less than inspiring in these matters. But so be it. For, the final consideration and consolation in all political matters must be that if history depended upon the merits of its actors, it would have ended long ago.