

ARISTOTLE : THE THEORY OF CATHARSIS

Aristotle was born at Stagirus in Macedonia. He was the son of Nicomachus, court-physician to King Amyntas II of Macedonia. Stagirite was the nickname of Aristotle. Aristotle has taken the word 'Catharsis' from his father's profession. His father was a physician. Though Aristotle has used the term 'Catharsis' only once, but many and strange are the interpretations of the word that have been given ever since the Renaissance. It is fact that Aristotle himself has not explained what exactly he meant by the word.

There are different interpretation of the word 'Catharsis'. The meaning of catharsis is 'purgation'. Catharsis has been taken to be a medical metaphor 'purgation'. It means denoting a pathological effect on the soul analogous to the effect of medicine on the body. It is the process likened to homeopathic treatment with the like curing the like. It is said and found that arousing of pity and fear results in the 'purgation' of these emotions. In a tragedy, 'pity and fear' artificially stirred expel the latent pity and fear which we bring with us from real life. Such incidental emotions as anxiety, self-pity etc. are also quieted. In our sympathy for the sufferer on the stage, we forget our own troubles and worries. In the pleasurable calm which follows when the passion is spent, an emotional cure is wrought. Used in the medical sense, catharsis implies relief following previous excitation of the tragic emotions. The concept of Catharsis is mainly intellectual. It is neither didactic nor theological, though it may have a residual theological element, as tragedy had its basis in religious rituals.