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Poets-expulsion and *catharsis*

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Jean-Jack Rousseau criticized arts, especially dramas, invoking Plato's criticism of poets. Rousseau's political theory, however, appears to differ vastly from Plato's. Why Rousseau should seek his help? Despite the seeming difference, these two philosophers share a fundamental principle, namely edifying people. They judge emotional effects of dramas to be harmful for people and obstructive to the edification. In this basis, Plato expelled poets from his ideal *police* and Rousseau maintained, defying d'Alembert, Geneva to be kept off theaters.

Democracy, of course, was contrarily evaluated by them, although they had the common conviction. Athene in BCE 5th century, when Plato lived, descended into the mobocracy, which he was compelled to denounce, while Rousseau despaired over the monarchy in France in 18th century, asserting the popular sovereignty. Besides or beyond this point, human natures they presupposed were incompatible with each other. Rousseau conceived that people have a good nature intrinsically and the government is based on the general spontaneity of people. On the other hand, Plato credited that the philosophers alone can contemplate *idea* of

the good and ought to have the initiative of the government.

In 18th century, the ethical interpretation of *catharsis* had a broad influence throughout Europe. *Catharsis* has been interpreted in various ways ever since Aristotle mentioned it in *Poetics* and *Politics*. According to the ethical interpretation, *catharsis* means purifying excessive emotions of people by provoking intense emotions. In other words, *catharsis* renders people free from superfluous emotions and elevates their soul ethically. Yet Rousseau rejected this precept and denied dramas the ethical effect. He confirmed that dramas cannot enhance people because they are nothing but amusement.

Kant valued all sorts of arts in a positive way, notwithstanding his admiration for Rousseau. In the aesthetic theory of Kant, beauty and arts are able to cultivate and sublimate people's soul. His theory had affinity with the ethical interpretation of *catharsis* in 18th century indeed, but he did not at all approve emotions stirred by arts. Therefore he disapproved the purification by arousing intense emotions and eliminated emotional effects themselves from arts.

Kant perhaps intended to respond to Rousseau's criticism of arts and, though his intention was uncertain, Kant in effect responded to Plato's poets-expulsion as well. As a result, we can affirm that Kant proved the social validity of arts and the modern aesthetics started from his theory. This does not mean that we all have to accept his aesthetics, but in any age or country, we are always obliged to define beauty and arts academically, unless they are mere amusement.