

THE PHILOSOPHY OF POINTING FINGER IN ART**Tamseel Hafsa**

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ABSTRACT

The human has a huge treasure of knowledge built-in his subconscious including his various faiths and beliefs. This knowledge is expressed by humans through various means like communicating through tongue, facial expression and body language (postures, gestures and different body movements). Among these expressions, in this study our main focus is on the use of handy movements specially the use of pointing finger to interpret the knowledge, feelings, emotions and beliefs composed in the sub-conscious of human. In this paper, firstly the use of pointing finger in daily life by the different characters (infants, children's, parents, teachers) is explained. After that its use in the art in different paintings of famous artists of the renaissance era is detailed. As a result of this exercise, we concluded that the pointing finger is used to show one of the main beliefs of the human when directed towards the sky which is the belief in one God. Apart from this, pointing finger is also used to refer self superiority, others guilt and their soulfulness when pointed other three directions.

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KEYWORDS: Pointing Finger, Art Philosophy, Renaissance Artists, Jesus, God**INTRODUCTION**

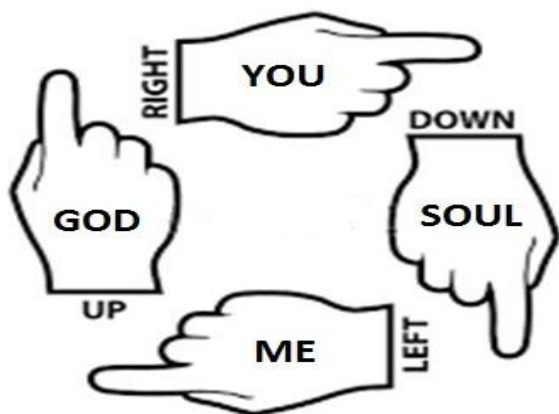
Philosophy and Science have proved that human has a huge treasure of knowledge in his sub-conscious. He expresses this knowledge by different body movements as he gets birth. The best hobbies of infants include playing with their hands, watching them and wondering on their movements. Soon, the child starts demanding different things by the help of his handy movement. This way, in early ages he gets learned to speak by the means of his pointing finger. These handy movements can be referred as the first language of the child. He starts expressing his wishes through his handy movements, which also help others to understand their wishes and personality. Apart from that he identifies the names of different things, persons and relations by pointing them out, which can deemed as the primary learning process of the child. Therefore, we can conclude that the pointing finger is the main source of expression of the sub-conscious for the human since his early ages.

By getting to the age of school, child's confidence starts increasing and he begins using his hands in speeches, debates and reading poems and that becomes his favorite acts in early ages. When he starts getting mature his intelligence can be judged through the movement of his hands while expressing his feelings. At this age, along with the education, the nature also captures his attention. Beautiful sceneries make his heart happy. He tries to understand the different schemes of the stars by the help of his pointing finger. He also point out the flying

things like planes, birds and butterflies through his pointing finger and make them noticed by others. He points his finger towards the sky for the invisible objects as he thinks that all invisible things belong to the sky.

When this concept is analyzed in more depth than it can be predicted that the use of pointing finger is not just an expression but it is a complete philosophy, which shows the attitude of people of all ages. If an infant shows his desires by the use of pointing finger, similarly in the same way parents also use this finger to guide and teach their kids. Mother makes learn the kid walking by the help of her index finger which the kid holds and then walks with her. When he gets learned how to walk and goes out with his father, he keeps holding father's index finger to ensure that he is safe in secure. Parents signify different things via this finger to make the kid identify, know and memories these things. Same approach is used by the teachers/mentor to deliver knowledge to his students. Gaining knowledge is a life time activity of human beings and pointing finger plays an important role in this process. Reading and writing both are somehow done with the help of index finger. While reading, index finger works a guide to the eyes and it moves along the line whose reading is going on. Similarly, when there is nothing to write with and write on, human starts writing with his index finger on the floor, wall, sand or glass. Although, it's visible but the urge to write gets fulfilled this way.

Further, the index finger can also be used negatively or positively through its use in different directions. To show one's ego he points out the index finger towards himself and to blame someone this finger is placed towards others to put on allegation upon them. These may be said the negative uses of the index finger. Whereas, if the index finger is directed towards the earth it shows the soulfulness and the humbleness of a person and when it is directed towards the sky it depicts the greatness of the God and also shows one's belief in the existence of God. These can be said as the positive uses of this index finger.



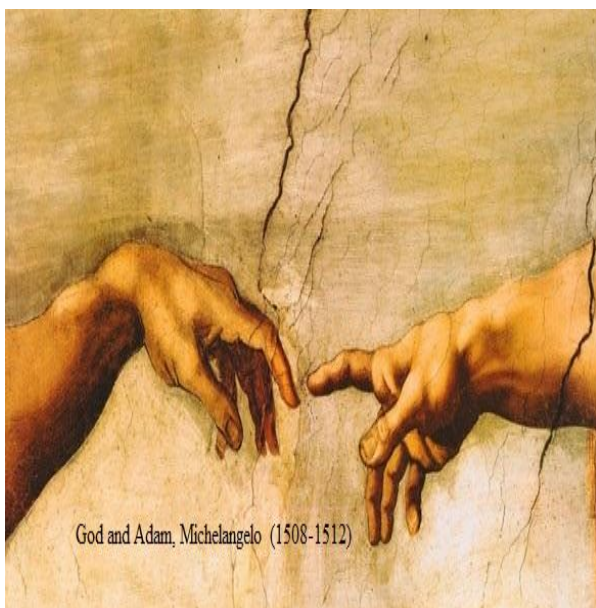
If we discuss the role of pointing finger in art we can see the examples of many paintings in which pointing finger has seen used in different meanings. These examples cover a huge passage of time which is spread over from the inception of the world to the current era. The great artists like Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael has used the pointing finger in their great paintings from which few paintings have been discussed over here.

The painting “the creation of Adam” by Michelangelo (1508-1512) was found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. Michelangelo painted the series of frescoes that portrayed several biblical stories. However, the most famous painting in this series was “the creation of Adam”.



“Michelangelo conceives the story of creation in reverse order, as the ascent of humanity from its lowest estate back to its divine origin” (Marine & Fleming, 2005).

In this painting the artist has painted the moment when God created the first human “Adam”. The pointing finger of God is towards Adam showing that he has created him with his pointing finger. While the Adam's pointing finger is towards God which is his confession about the greatness of his creator. The artist has painted his imagination so well. He has shown the God's greatness, power and domination by keeping him in a higher position which seems like a space ship going back towards the sky and like He just came on Earth to create Adam. The God has many other human with him in this space ship who are also likely to get births on their specific time as the Adam got his birth. The artist painted the humbleness, humanness and subordination of Adam by keeping him in a lower, lazy, laying position on the earth. Being the creator, the God is in an active posture with hard expressions on his face. His beard and hair are blowing in the air which is showing his pace and speed. He is taking care of many humans in his ship which is showing His greatness. Whereas, being a human, Adam has been painted in a passive position with soft expressions on his face. His questioning eyes are showing his loneliness and weakness on being on earth. This whole scene is referring towards an important story of bible.



God and Adam, Michelangelo (1508-1512)

“As He stretches out His hand, not even touching Adam’s finger, we almost see the first man waking, as from a profound sleep, and gazing into the fatherly face of his Maker. It is one of the Greatest miracles in art how Michelangelo has contrived thus to make the touch of the Divine hand the center and focus of the picture, and how he has made us see the idea of omnipotence by the ease and power of this gesture of creation” (Gombrich, 1995).

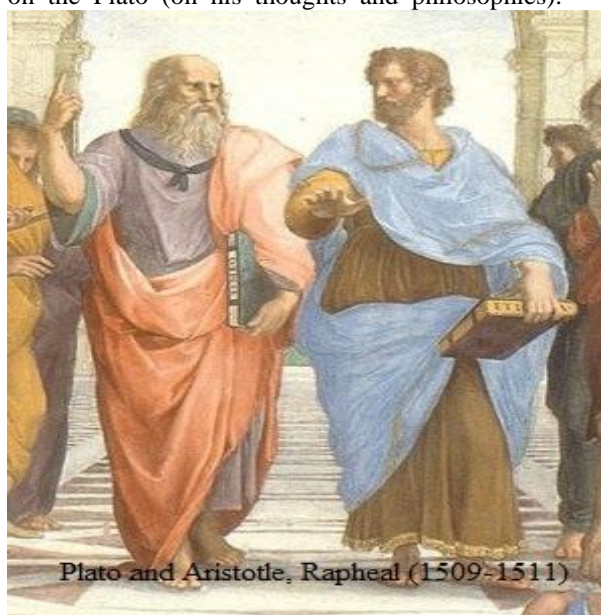
Second example of use of pointing finger in art is painting of Raphael named as “School of Athens” (1509-1511).

“Raphael was working on the murals of the Vatican Palace. In School of Athens, Raphael Plato and Aristotle on either side of the central axis of the fresco, with vanishing point slicing backward between them” (Marine & Fleming, 2005).



The School of Athens Raphael (1509-1511)

In this painting almost fifty people have been painted. These fifty people include all important Philosophers, scientists, mathematicians and artists of that time and they were gathered in Vatican palace in Rome, Italy. There are also statues of Greek God and Goddess in this painting. However, it can be noticed that the main focus of the painting is on two huge personalities Plato and Aristotle. This can be determined as they both are painted in the center axis of the picture and many of the people in the picture are concentrated towards them. The artist has tried to paint the whole philosophy of these two personalities through their getup, posture, dressing and pointing finger. Plato is in a straight posture having long beard and hair which can be assessed as a Sufi getup like Michelangelo painted the God. His dress’s color showing his closeness to the two main components of the world “Fire and Air” (Which are more intangible and there existence can be felt rather being seen or touched). His pointing finger is towards the sky showing his ultimate belief in one God. These all points affirm the spirituality of the Plato. On the other hand, Aristotle is in a posture like emphasizing on something. His beard and hair are looking so modern in that time period. The color of his showing closeness to the other two components of the world “Sand and Water” (which are tangible and definite components and can be seen and touched). His hand is directed towards the earth and his fingers’ posture is showing his emphasis that everything is inside the earth not elsewhere. These all points affirm the materialistic approach of the Aristotle. Further Plato has been painted in a feel of independence and soulfulness. While, the Aristotle has been shown as being dependent on the Plato (on his thoughts and philosophies).



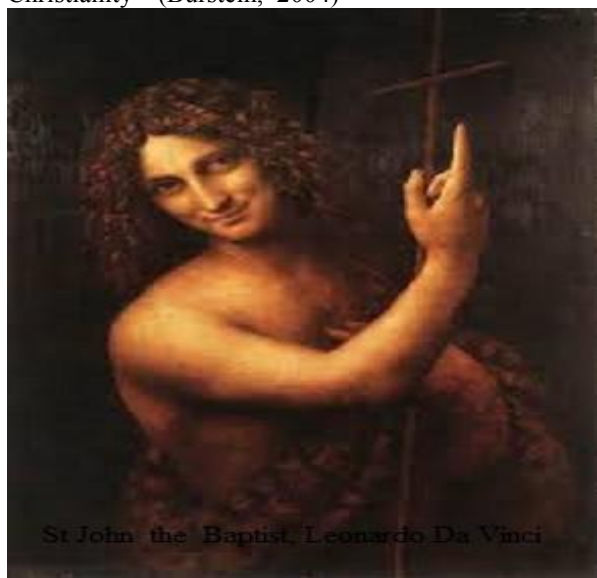
Plato and Aristotle, Raphael (1509-1511)

“These two figures represent the two great, opposing schools of philosophy, the Platonists,

who were concerned with the spiritual word of ideas (thus Plato points upwards), and the Aristotelians, who were concerned with the matter-of-factness of material reality (thus Aristotle points over the ground upon which he walks)” (Sayre, 2000).

If we discuss the Leonardo’s use of pointing finger, we can say that He also used the pointing finger in the same spiritual meaning.

“Leonardo was a true believer---a believer, that is, in any accepted, or acceptable, form of Christianity” (Burstein, 2004)

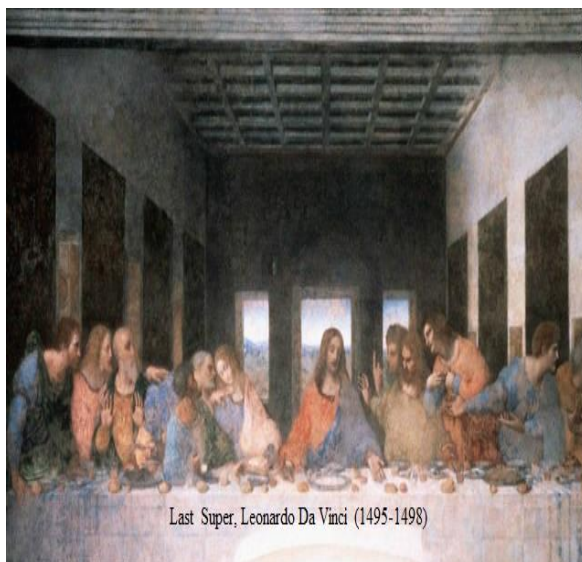


St John the Baptist, Leonardo Da Vinci

“Leonardo’s particular skill was to endow his mainly religious subject with a spirituality and enigmatic beauty unsurpassed in the history of Fine art” (Hodge & Anson, 1996).

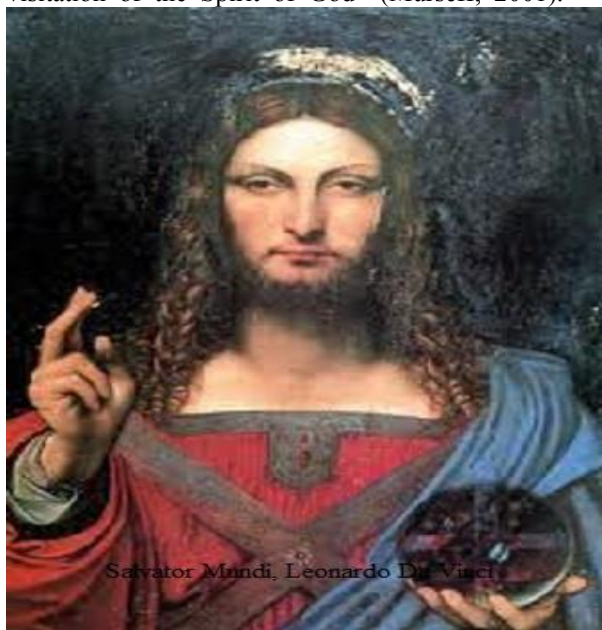
He used pointing finger in His many paintings and cartoons For example “Last Supper”, “Virgin of the Rock”, “Virgin and child with Saint.Anne and Saint.John”, “St John the Baptist” and “St John in the Wilderness (Bacchus)”. Many have made allusions towards the painting’s meanings regarding the pointed finger. So in last supper the Leonardo’s painted to the right of Jesus, Thomas stands in profile, his finger pointing up in the air. Some speculate that this gesture is meant to isolate Thomas's finger, which becomes key in a later Bible story when Jesus rises from the dead. Thomas doubts his eyes, and so is entreated to probe Jesus' wounds with his finger to help him believe.

“Leonardo painted last Super (1495-1498) which both formally and emotionally is Leonardo’s most important work. Jesus and his 12 disciples sit at along table placed parallel to the picture plane in a simple, specious room..... Jesus, without stretched hands, has just said, “One of you is about to betray me” (Matt.26:21)”. (S.Kleiner, 2014)



The pointed finger is a symbol used in alchemy, and many classic paintings, as well as being used on old gravestones. It represent the person's relationship with the spiritual world – in a sense where they are [or were if they are dead] on the spiritual path. An allusion to the mystery, the finger pointed towards heaven denotes the coming of Christ.

“Jesus was not a human being who had been elevated to a high spiritual condition by the visitation of the Spirit of God” (MurseII, 2001).



Salvator Mundi, Leonardo Da Vinci

“No wonder that his example inspired others: ‘Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to them, “ Lord, teach us to pray”” (Luke 11:1) (MurseII, 2001).

The pointing finger has been used in the art in multiple meanings. However, its most important use can be declared as to show the spirituality and belief in one God. Raphael painted the great

philosopher Plato with pointing finger towards the sky to show his spirituality and belief in one God. Further, he painted Plato's face similar to the self portrait of the famous painter of that time "Leonardo Da Vinci". This approach of Raphael links the Leonardo's belief to the Plato's. So this can be concluded that Leonardo was also a spiritual human being and had belief in one God. He painted the Christ in many paintings with two fingers in the air in which the pointing finger refers towards the God and the second finger towards him. Michelangelo took this spirituality and belief in one God from the Christ to the Adam i.e. to the inception of the world. He painted Adam with a pointing finger not towards the sky but directly towards the God to show his belief in his greatness and unity. He also painted the God with the pointing finger towards Adam and the earth which shows that when someone points his finger towards the sky to admit his belief in one God then at the same time God also points His finger toward him to affirm his belief and to answer that yes I am great and yes I am one. In Islam, when such verses are recited in which one admits that there is only one God and no other except Him, The reciter takes his pointing finger in the air to show his agreement with the verses he is reciting. This absolutely affirms the spiritual and religious use of pointing finger which is also exercised by the great painters of all times.

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